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Twitch.tv and its LGBTQIA+ Tag: A Digital Ethnography Investigating How LGBTQIA+-affirming Video Game Streamers and Viewers Interact and Build LGBTQIA+ Spaces Online

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TWITCH.TV AND ITS LGBTQIA+ TAG: A DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHY INVESTIGATING HOW LGBTQIA+-AFFIRMING VIDEO GAME STREAMERS AND VIEWERS INTERACT AND BUILD LGBTQIA+ SPACES ONLINE

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LGBT people use online communities to find information and people with shared experiences. Many also find communities within video game culture. However, there is some tension between LGBT people and "true gamers" who are typically white cisgender heterosexual men. For those who do not fit the "true gamer" label, studies have found high levels of online harassment. This study investigates how LGBT people use Twitch.tv, a livestreaming video game website. Built on previous research of LGBT people, online communities, and video game culture, I answer the question: How, and to what extent, do interactions between streamers and viewers using the LGBTQIA+ tag on Twitch contribute to building and maintaining the streamer's community of viewers? I conducted a virtual ethnographic study from a symbolic interactionist perspective, observing over 14 hours of Twitch streams with the LGBTQIA+ tag, and conducting 11 semi-structured interviews with streamers who use the tag. This study offers three contributions to the sociology of media and LGBTQ studies. First, the LGBTQIA+ tag acts as a mediator for streamer-viewer interactions because of its meaning related to LGBT identity and indication of an LGBT-affirming space. Second, these spaces are maintained through boundaries set by the streamers which enforce insider and outsider

roles that are inversed compared to the “true gamer” stereotype in video game culture overall. Third, the interactions within these streams align with previous research on networked broadcasts, but also add conversations on LGBT issues, pop culture, and experiences as part of the stream.

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Introduction

Twitch.tv is a popular live-streaming website with tags that streamers can apply to their streams, one of which is the LGBTQIA+ tag (Twitch 2020a). LGBT people use online communities to find information, people with shared experiences, and communities (see Gray 2009). Many people also find communities within video game culture (see Domahidi, Festl, and Quandt 2014; Kort-Butler 2021; Williams 2009). However, there is some tension between LGBT people and people from other marginalized groups and those who are considered "true gamers," who tend to be white cisgender heterosexual men. For those who do not fit the "true gamer" label, studies have found high levels of online harassment (see Cross 2014; Evans and Janish 2015; Lindner and Barnard 2020; Paaßen, Morgenroth, and Stratemeyer 2017). These studies have also discovered that LGBT people use the Internet and online communities to find information from people with shared experiences, but at the same time are subject to online harassment within video game culture.

While there are studies on video game culture and Twitch's presence within it, the LGBTQIA+ tag and its role in the formation of LGBT-affirming online communities has not been investigated. In this study, I build on previous research of LGBT people, online communities, and video game culture and combine those into an investigation of LGBT people within video game culture. This study is guided by the main research question: How, and to what extent, do interactions between streamers and viewers using the LGBTQIA+ tag on Twitch contribute to building and maintaining the streamer's community of viewers?

To answer this question, I conducted a virtual ethnographic study from a symbolic interactionist perspective (Blumer 1969). I observed 14 ½ hours of Twitch streams that use the LGBTQIA+ tag and conducted semi-structured interviews with 11 Twitch streamers who use the LGBTQIA+ tag. The findings of this study show that the LGBTQIA+ tag helps people locate streamers and communities who are LGBT-affirming and these spaces are maintained through boundaries set by the streamers and communities which, according to Merton (1972), enforce insider and outsider roles which is inversed compared to the "true gamer" versus not true gamer binary within video game culture overall.

Literature Review

Symbolic Interactionism and the Sociology of Media

In his foundational theory of symbolic interactionism, Herbert Blumer (1969: 2) proposed three basic premises. First, that people "act toward things on the basis of meanings that the things have for them" such as objects, other people, friends, enemies, family, institutions, values, requests, and everyday situations. Second, these meanings are formed from our social interactions with our peers. The third premise focuses on how we interpret these meanings when we encounter situations. This study draws from the broad framework of symbolic interactionism to examine how people use media to find communities through digital means.

The theories within media sociology, according to Lindner and Barnard (2020), stems from the sociology of culture and Griswold's (1994) cultural diamond (image 1). The four points of this diamond consist of the cultural object representing any item that is part of a culture, the creator who creates these cultural objects, the receiver who then uses

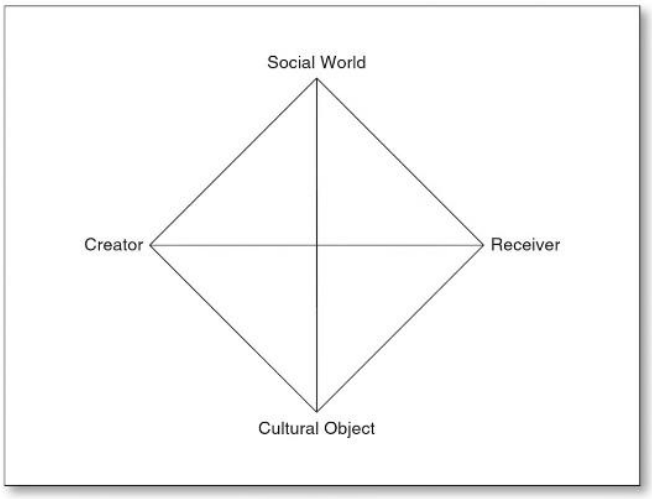

Image 1. Griswold's (1994) Cultural Diamond

the cultural objects, and the social world which represents the society and institutions that affect how these cultural objects are created (Griswold 1994; Lindner and Barnard 2020). This visualization provides an understanding of how aspects of mass media are formed and then reformed not only through the relationship between the cultural object and receiver or the creator and receiver, but the relationship between these parts and the social world as well as how these relationships are interconnected (Griswold 1994; Lindner and Barnard 2020).

The theories within media sociology that focus on media spaces—including online communities such as websites, video game worlds, forums—examine media and how it is used to create connections and build communities. Habermas (1991), for instance, discusses the truly democratic society and how it should be a public sphere that lets people come together to discuss important issues in an inclusive environment and judging ideas on their own merit and not their social status. Castells (1997) adds onto Habermas's (1991) ideas around the public sphere and theorized that media spaces such as digital and online communities could have potential in creating this public sphere as

well as shape thoughts on who is considered a creator and the kinds of cultural objects they can produce. This aligns with Blumer's (1969: 2) second premise in that these public spheres involve social interaction “that one has with one’s fellows” and provides a space for these meanings to form.

As for Blumer's (1969) first and third premises, previous research in the relationship between media and society has found that media itself can influence people and how they react to certain images or how we connect with people and create communities. For instance, McLuhan (1994), who coined the phrase “the medium is the message,” focused on the connection between people and media through how media’s images and sounds activate our senses and are used to connect people in a “global village.” Expanding on those ideas, Benkler (2006) applied those concepts to the Internet and its role in creating societies using global social networks. Applying our senses influences our ability to interpret our surroundings which, according to Blumer (1969), would maintain and modify the meanings that we associate with those senses. Another aspect of these interpretations, as part of Griswold's (1994) cultural diamond, is the social world and its influence in the formation of cultural objects as well as the creators and receivers.

While media spaces themselves have a major influence in the media created and the communities formed, the receivers of media messages are not passive. They too create meanings associated with a cultural object and play a major role in the interactions and formations of media communities through the forms of media they choose to consume. Two prominent researchers, Blumler and Katz (1974), developed the uses and

gratifications model through a series of studies and found that people's desire to consume dramatic fiction or real-life political conflict as well as feel connected either to real or imagined communities influenced why they watched television. The uses and gratification model can help guide us with the question "Why do we use media anyway?" (Blumler and Katz 1974; Lindner and Barnard 2020). The uses and gratification model is typically applied to qualitative interviews and surveys to see "how people select and consume media to satisfy emotional, spiritual, and intellectual needs" (Lindner and Barnard 2020: 149; see also Pai and Arnott 2013; Raacke and Bonds-Raacke 2008).

Along with the desires that influence our media choices, our taste in media is also influenced by our social networks such as friends, family, and others as we learn about media from them (Lindner and Barnard 2020). Media consumption is a social activity, even if taking place in isolation. People experience media through the groups of which they are a part (Lindner and Barnard 2020). Within these groups, we are likely to have the same views as other members and our shared interests create boundaries between insiders and "the other" with statements like the example used by Lindner and Barnard (2020: 23), "I like all music except for country" (see also Bryson 1996). This formation of boundaries and the idea of us versus "the other" aligns with Merton's (1972) research on the formation of insiders and outsiders. To be one of the insiders, one must have certain types of knowledge and claim that the outsider is incapable of gaining that knowledge or, in the case of the "all music" person, hate country music (Merton 1972). Outsiders, much like insiders, also claim that they have knowledge that the other group is incapable of learning, but it is based on the assumption that the other group is socially

detached and therefore cannot gain access to their knowledge or, in the case of the example, assume that the “all music” person hates country because they just do not know enough about it or have not heard the good country songs (Merton 1972). The roles that insiders and outsiders have involve exchanging knowledge with others in the group, much like how we learn about media through our friends, family, and others through conversation and consuming media together (Lindner and Barnard 2020; Merton 1972). This process, as summarized by Lamont and Molnár (2002), utilizes boundary-work focusing on how the context shapes the creation of those boundaries which, in the case of gender and sexualities, involve symbolic boundaries that are perpetuated through representations of LGBT people (see Brekhus 1996; Gamson 1998; Stein 1997).

The impact of othering also occurs online through the Internet and digital communications which can influence the experience we have with pieces of media. The Internet provides an environment where opportunities for representation of women, men, LGBTQ people, and others are prominent (Lindner and Barnard 2020). However, there are downsides to this freedom with content and the representations that exist on the Internet, namely there is a lot of sexist, threatening statements made by "trolls" within the feeds of prominent people with marginalized identities every day (Lindner and Barnard 2020). Representation of women can also be sexualized and reinforce gender stereotypes, in part from internet pornography that is widely consumed by men as well as violence through the simulations of violence against women that are reproduced and distributed (Lindner and Barnard 2020; see also Cohen 2014; Hether and Murphy 2010; Shor et al. 2015; Women’s Media Center 2015).

However, the Internet also provides spaces for communities to form such as feminist groups, opportunities for female writers and filmmakers, and support for activism around gender inequality (Lindner and Barnard 2020). Gray (2009) specifically investigated rural LGBT and allied youth and their Internet usage to see how they used the Internet and their intentions behind the websites they used. For LGBT and allied youth in rural areas, Gray found that, instead of using the Internet as a form of escapism, they use the Internet to find information that pertains to their home or family situations and people with similar experiences to them. Rural LGBT and allied youth used online forums and websites to find coming out stories and other authentic personal stories. Authenticity here is used to refer to real-life stories and depictions of LGBT people that readers can learn from compared to the fictional stories seen on TV shows and movies (Gray 2009).

Blumer's (1969) three premises can be applied to the Internet and the information, communities, and representations within it. Regarding the first premise, humans act based on the meanings that certain things have for them which can vary from physical objects to human beings to institutions (Blumer 1969). On the Internet, users create meaning based on the sites they interact with such as the rural LGBT and allied youth in Gray's (2009) study or the women who, as Lindner and Barnard (2020) noted, found feminist groups that provided spaces to find meanings that the users have for them. The second premise, that the meaning of these spaces is developed through social interaction with other people like them (Blumer 1969), is prevalent in online feminist groups and LGBT forums (Gray 2009; Lindner and Barnard 2020). The third, that these meanings are

maintained and modified through the person dealing with everything they encounter, reveals itself when rural LGBT and allied youth apply what they learn from the information and experiences told online to their situations at home or in their communities (Blumer 1969; Gray 2009). The communities and meanings we tie to the Internet also applies to video games with how we find meaning in the medium itself and those we meet within these communities (see Domahidi, Festl, and Quandt 2014; Kort-Butler 2021; Williams 2009).

Video Game Culture

Within video games, there is a sense of "unreal" worlds versus the "real" world, creating a binary between the two that would influence the norms and values players of these games hold (Cross 2014). Interactions within the video gaming community influence the norms and values of social relations that, according to Boellstorff (2006: 33), have "potential for new freedoms and new creativity as well as new oppressions and inequality." These norms tend to benefit white cisgender heterosexual men who were considered "true gamers" while women, non-white people, LGBT people, and other marginalized people were not considered true gamers (Cross 2014; Evans and Janish 2015; Lindner and Barnard 2020; Paaßen et al. 2017). The meanings behind the actions of players within video games and the norms are reinforced through the interactions players have with each other in the game. The meanings formed can vary depending on the player and their background depending on if they are part of a marginalized group or not (Cross 2014; Evans and Janish 2015; Paaßen et al. 2017).

Many people think of video games as an escape from real life or as part of leisure compared to work, but, in fact, online gaming, can cause stress (Taylor 2018). Interacting

with people from various parts of the world can force individuals to confront opinions different from their own and add more of the stress that can appear in the workplace (Taylor 2018). We must also take into consideration that our social identities, communities, and institutions influence our experience with leisure, or as stated by Taylor (2018: 12), “[o]ur identities, bodies, and social and political worlds are always tied up in it.” These identities play a role in the assumptions of the outsiders by the insiders of video game culture, dismissing outsiders as people who do not know what they are talking about or who they believe is affecting the community in a negative way (Merton 1972).

For most white cisgender heterosexual men playing video games, the norms are tailored to them and the representation of prominent influencers seen within video games and related content is male dominated (Cross 2014; Evans and Janish 2015; Lindner and Barnard 2020; Paaßen et al. 2017). These "true gamers" act as the insiders of the video gaming community who define the boundaries (Cross 2014; Evans and Janish 2015; Merton 1972; Paaßen et al. 2017). People who do not fit the definition of a "true gamer" — those who are not white, cisgender, heterosexual, and/or men — are considered outsiders and face harassment and/or silencing with GamerGate being a prominent example of this (Cross 2014; Evans and Janish 2015; Lindner and Barnard 2020; Paaßen et al. 2017). The events that sparked GamerGate involved male gamers’ reactions towards women like Zoe Quinn, a game developer who released a game bringing attention to mental illness called *Depression Quest*, and Anita Sarkeesian, a feminist cultural critic with a YouTube series called *Tropes vs. Women in Video Games* (Lindner

and Barnard 2020). These reactions involved threatening phone calls, rape threats on Twitter, and other types of threats and harassment online and in real life (Lindner and Barnard 2020). While actions like these existed before GamerGate, the harassment campaign highlighted how many in the video game community treated people of different races, genders, sexualities, and other nonnormative identities (Evans and Janish 2015; Lindner and Barnard 2020; Paaßen et al. 2017).

Supporters of GamerGate believed that feminist ideas and "unmerited praise for female developers" were negatively influencing video gaming overall (Lindner and Barnard 2020). Evans and Janish (2015) refer to these ideas as the reaction to the "queering of game spaces" that Quinn, Sarkeesian, and others were doing. The norms within video gaming communities, as mentioned before, tends to benefit those with privilege such as white cisgender heterosexual men and troubling behavior like harassment towards women as part of that norm because they believe that video games are a different environment compared to real life (Cross 2014). These responses show that GamerGate supporters hold meaning to the video games they play and the video gaming communities they are a part of, fulfilling Blumer's (1969) first premise.

This meaning, in terms of Blumer's (1969) second premise, is formed through the social interactions that occur within these gaming spaces. These social interactions occur within this virtual environment and the sociotechnical systems players encounter cause behavior that leads to how these games can foster inclusion and exclusion which are tied to our selves and identities offline (Taylor 2018). Our selves and identities are then part of the interpretive process that handle and modify the meanings we associate with a

certain video game or video gaming community, thus fulfilling the third premise (Blumer 1969; Taylor 2018).

The meanings people associate with video games, in terms of Blumer's (1969) second premise, is formed through the social interactions that occur within these gaming spaces. The sociotechnical systems players encounter cause behavior that leads to how these games can foster inclusion and exclusion which are tied to our identities offline (Cross 2014; Taylor 2018). Identities are then part of the interpretive process that handle and modify the meanings we associate with a certain video game or video gaming community, thus fulfilling the third premise (Blumer 1969; Taylor 2018). These interpretations then affect how people play video games or participate within the video gaming community as players who do not fit the "true gamer" react to the policed boundaries and enforced forms of communication and boundaries that leave them feeling harassed and excluded (Cross 2014; Taylor 2018).

These forms of exclusion can lead marginalized players to make choices about their gameplay to avoid this harassment such as the woman described in Cross's (2014) study who, after being asked out by male players repeatedly, decided to play *EverQuest* as a male character. Other research has documented that gamers who identify as men play as a male or female character and typically do not associate that with their gender identity, but rather with aesthetic pleasure and mastery of the game (MacCallum-Stewart 2008). Men playing female characters is part of the norm within video games to the point where wondering if a female character is being played by a woman or not is a common occurrence (MacCallum-Stewart 2008). Many video games, starting with those in arcades

and in the "beat 'em ups" genre that involved one-on-one fights, let players choose from a roster of characters that each had a set of skills with advantages and disadvantages (MacCallum-Stewart 2008). It was common for men to pick female characters because of the skills they had, adding meaning beyond gender identity or presentation, and modified as the player kept getting experience with the game following Blumer's (1969) first and third premises (MacCallum-Stewart 2008). These differing skills and roles the video game characters become central to the meaning of a character within a game.

Gaming reveals a double standard between men and women when it comes to what characters people can play as and how they are treated. Players like the woman mentioned in Cross's (2014) study typically respond to issues of harassment or being labeled as "incompetent" at gaming by either doing nothing or hiding their "real-life gender." In doing so, they also use more anonymity to protect themselves when they can (Cross 2014). However, anonymity is a major part of a common misunderstanding that people have on online communities believing it contributes to the levels of online harassment which resulted in social media sites and video game designers attempting to minimize anonymity and require identifiers with personal information to use a site or play a game (Cross 2014). In doing so, the possibility of facing harassment and the harassers finding a player's personal information is higher and could lead to more harassment outside of the website or video game (Cross 2014).

In online as well as offline settings, women tend to receive more negative comments, including more violent comments, compared to their male counterparts (Lindner and Barnard 2020). Online, this harassment is commonly known as "trolling" or

what Mantilla (2013) calls "gendertrolling." Gendertrolling is different from trolling in that the purpose is to silence women and discussions on gender inequality with negative comments and/or threats of violence (Mantilla 2013). According to a Pew Research study, 70% of women between the ages of 18 and 24 had been victims of at least one form of online harassment out of the six that they tracked (Duggan 2014). Within these experiences of online harassment, this study showed that 26% of these women were stalked online and that 25% experienced sexual harassment (Duggan 2014). An example of the type of harassment that exists in video game culture and how severe it can be are the threats towards the women targeted by GamerGate (Lindner and Barnard 2020). Zoe Quinn, as cited in Lindner and Barnard (2020: 117-118), said that someone directed a threat towards her saying, "Next time she shows up at a conference we ... give her a crippling injury that's never going to fully heal."

Harassment and threats like this are bound to shift one's meaning of video games and the video gaming community and enact parts of Blumer's (1969) second premise as these types of social interactions as well as the enforced boundaries that maintain who is considered a "true gamer" or, as Merton (1972) would say, the insider in the community. Marginalized players who experience harassment may seek another video game to play or another community to take part in that better fulfills their needs. As Boellstorff (2006: 33) describes, there are multiple cultures of gaming that includes subcultures such as ones that are for "youth, male versus female, cooperative gaming versus competitive gaming" and more. The existence of these subcultures can provide a place for those outsiders to find others like them and where they can be insiders and gain that knowledge, much like

the rural LGBT and allied youth searching the Internet for information about the LGBT community that they can apply into their own lives and finding others like them that share their experiences, providing a real-life example of being part of the LGBT community (Gray 2009).

Twitch.tv

One major platform that is a form of culture within video games is the live-broadcasting website, Twitch.tv which facilitates interactions among viewers and streamers that influence the stream itself in a process that Taylor (2018) calls a "networked broadcast." Instead of the viewers only watching the streamer play a video game or talk on their live broadcasts, viewers take a more active role and interact with the streamer and other viewers within Twitch's chat function to which the streamer reacts (Taylor 2018). The platform adds more media spaces where people with shared interests can interact as well as watch a video game that interests them. As for why people decide to stream or watch a streamer, Schofield and LeDone (2019) did two studies, the first one on streamers and their reasons behind choosing to live stream on Twitch and the second one on viewers and why they choose to watch certain streams. While the first study found that the participants on average were unsure if they would stream again on Twitch, the second study with viewers revealed that they watch Twitch streams because the video game that the streamer is playing is one that the viewer does not have, the viewer likes the streamer, the viewer wants to learn how to play the video game better, and for entertainment. Schofield and LeDone also found that those that scored highly in Community motivations on Yee's Gamer Motivation test were more likely to watch

Twitch streams again and that it could be associated with the interactions and communities that exist within these streams.

Through this, Blumer's (1969) third premise plays a role in not just the reception to the cultural object, or the live stream, but is also part of the formation of the cultural object and its associated meanings in ways that previous forms of media such as television have not achieved. These interactions shifted the way in which broadcasts are experienced and how video games are enjoyed. For instance, Walker (2014) says that these live streams shifted the video game experience from only play to "entertain, teach, critique, and share" through what Taylor (2018) says is the transformation of private play for oneself into public entertainment involving viewers.

These conversations appear in the chat to the right of the live stream and can include icons and "emotes" or emoticons that viewers use in the chat (Twitch 2020b) (image 2). The symbols to the left of the usernames in the chat indicate their roles related

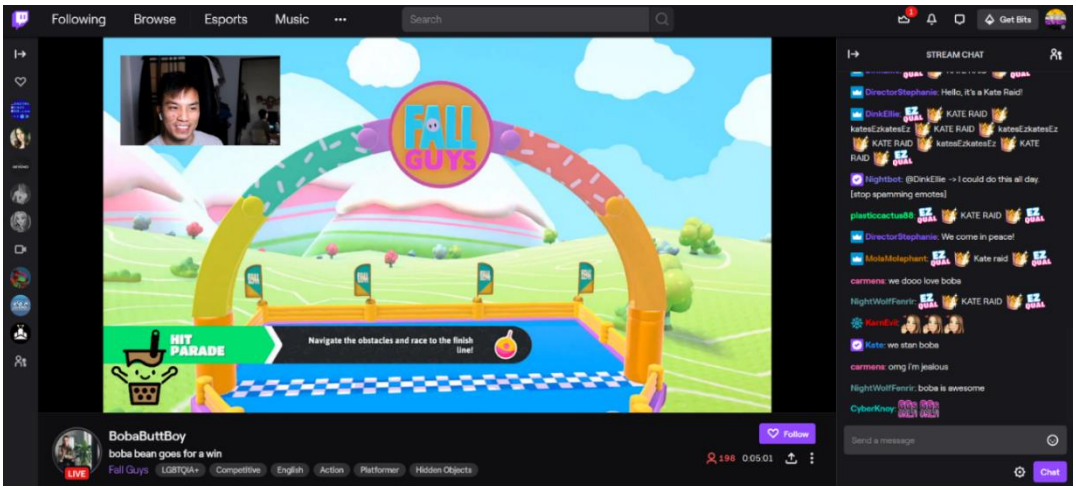

Image 2. A screenshot of BobaButtBoy's stream taken on August 26th, 2020

to the streamer. The most common ones are for the viewers who have subscribed to the streamer and pay $4.99 (US dollar) a month to watch a stream without advertisements

and have access to a subscriber-only perks such as emotes from that streamer and access to private Discord servers and channels. The other way viewers can become a subscriber is if they connect their Amazon Prime accounts to their Twitch accounts and get a free subscription. Others that have icons next to their names include moderators that help the streamer maintain their stream (indicated with a green sword icon on all Twitch streams), those who have given a streamer a certain amount of "bits," Twitch's form of tipping streamers, and VIPs that the streamer designates (Twitch 2020c) (see Appendix B for other Twitch terms and definitions).

In maintaining these live streams, Twitch has tools that streamers can use to make sure their viewers know what guidelines to follow and to restrict access to the chat in case a viewer breaks those rules or tries to disrupt the stream (image 3). Viewers who are

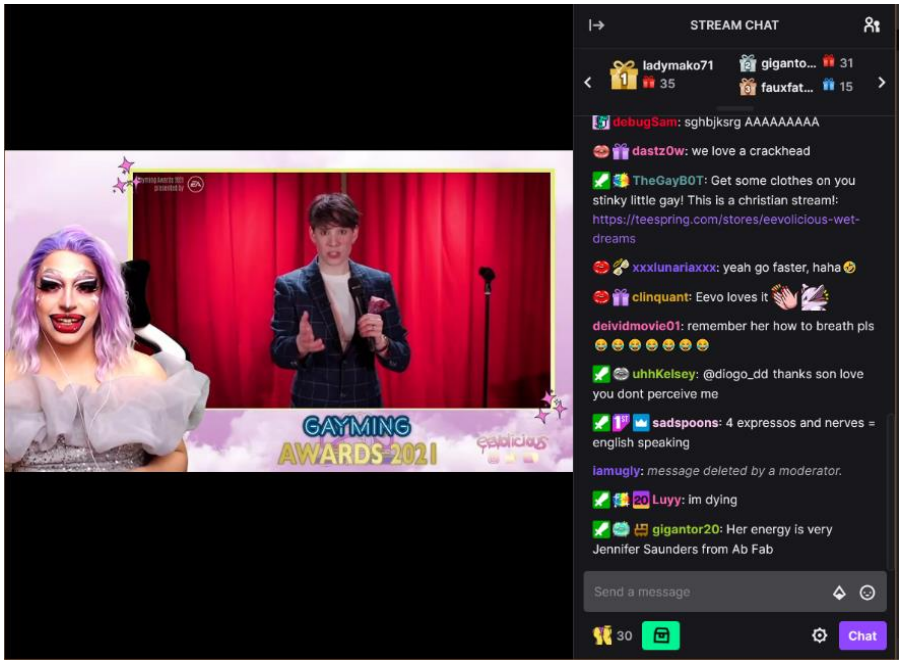

Image 3. A screenshot of Eevolicious's stream co-hosting the Gayming Awards 2021 taken on February 24th, 2021

restricted access and deviate from the guidelines will likely be excluded, as Taylor (2018) states, by being blocked from typing in the chat.

One unique feature of Twitch that help people locate streams within their interests are the tags that streamers can apply to their live streams. These tags are unique in that Twitch has a list of tags that streamers can use and that viewers can find in their search (Twitch 2020). While some tags are automatically applied to the streams (i.e., "English," the genre the game they are playing is in), streamers can apply additional tags that they believe represents their stream and make it appear in the search engine on Twitch. The tags that are available are set by Twitch and there is a list of all the available tags. One of the tags that is included on their list is the "LGBTQIA+" tag which is described on Twitch (2020b) is "[f]or streams in which the streamer chooses to identify as a member or ally of the LGBTQIA+ community." This allows for people to be able to type that tag into the search bar to find spaces that are meant to be LGBTQIA+-affirming.

This seems to combine searching for entertainment and community (Schofield and LeDone 2019) with information and authentic experiences being shared (Gray 2009). The tag, in this setting, work as an object that provides meaning as stated in Blumer's (1969), the meaning of the tag is formed through the interactions between streamers and viewers aligning with the second premise, and then there is the third premise which focuses on the interpretations of this meaning based on the encounters we have with the tag. This study focuses on investigating the third premise as well as the intersection between LGBT communities online and video game communities and how this

networked broadcast format plays a role in the formation of a media space catering to both types of communities.

It is important to note that the data for this study was collected from August 2020 to February 2021 when Twitch's LGBTQIA+ tag was the only tag for LGBT people and included allies. Since then, Twitch changed the language of the LGBTQIA+ tag's intended use by removing allies from the description and added 350 more tags including the ally and transgender tags as well as tags related to "race, nationality, ability, mental health," veterans, and Vtubers (Twitch 2021a). These new tags were announced on May 21st in 2021 and were made available on May 26th (Twitch 2021a, 2021b).

Methods

The aim of this study is to understand how interactions between streamers and viewers on Twitch streams using the LGBTQIA+ tag create online places for LGBTQIA+ people interested in video games. Moreover, I am particularly interest in the effects these interactions have in those communities. The main research question guiding this study and the two sub-questions that go further in depth are:

RQ1. How, and to what extent, do interactions between streamers and viewers using the LGBTQIA+ tag on Twitch contribute to building and maintaining the streamer's community of viewers?

Sub-RQ1. How, and to what extent, do these interactions help people share their experiences?

Sub-RQ2. How, and to what extent, do these interactions help people affirm their identities and influence their identity curation?

To investigate these questions, I used an inductive qualitative approach, specifically digital ethnography, to observe streams for moments when streamers and viewers would interact with each other for 14 ½ hours and conducted 11 semi-structured in-depth interviews with streamers. Memos were written after each observation session and interview and screenshots of the live streams were taken during the observations. As for data analysis, the memos, screenshots, and transcripts were coded for common themes using NVivo 12. Using a qualitative approach allowed myself to investigate the perspectives that people have on live streaming video games and the communities involved as well as experiences with streamers and viewers regarding finding a LGBT-affirming community and a video gaming community.

What this study investigates aligns with the qualities of ethnography which, as Creswell and Poth (2018: 93) state, "is appropriate if the needs are to describe how a cultural group works" as well as to explore "beliefs, language, behaviors, and issues" within the group. Since this study involved looking at the LGBT community as well as those who participated within video game culture, an ethnographic study is one of the best methods to use for the observations, interviews, and findings I planned on investigating. Then, going into digital ethnography, I investigated these interactions with the idea that the Internet is a representation of a place "where culture is formed and reformed" as well as seeing the Internet as a cultural artifact and a "product of culture" taking into consideration that the Internet provides places for culture to form as well as the Internet itself was formed through a culture around technology (Hine 2000). I planned to not only look at the culture within Twitch and the interactions within these live

streams, but also inquire about video game culture overall as the precursor towards live streaming gameplay that influenced the formation of Twitch.

Observations

Within my 14 ½ hours of observing Twitch streams, I used the website's search engine and typed in the tag "LGBTQIA+" as well as "English" in most cases due to the number of streamers that speak different languages that appear in the results page when you only enter the "LGBTQIA+" tag. The results page would then show the streamers that use the tag that are streaming at that moment. From there, I could see the thumbnail or smaller version of the streamer and broadcast stream, some of the other tags used, the game being played, and the number of people viewing the stream at that moment. When selecting which of those streams to watch, I examined the number of viewers and would try to find at least one "big" streamer, or a streamer with a high number of viewers, and one "small" streamer, or a streamer with a low number of viewers. I selected streams to watch using viewership because I intended to discover what interactions between streamers and viewers look like depending on the number of people participating. I would also watch streams of streamers that I knew about and received notifications from to account for what the beginning of streams look like as well as if there are any major events for that streamer and/or Twitch as a whole. Using this method for observations provides a means of gaining experience within the culture itself through a virtual space similarly to the way that ethnographers would on the ground as informants in the setting they are researching (Hine 2000). When I observed these streams, I followed an observation template to make sure I was looking for certain types of interactions such as

conversations, viewers breaking rules, or conversations about LGBT topics as well as see if the streamer used a bot or not and had social media or a means to interact with their community outside of Twitch (see Appendix C).

Interviews

I used snowball sampling to recruit interview participants. First, I used social media to recruit initial participants online, and then, after the interviews, asked participants if they knew any other people who are streamers or viewers active in the chat within Twitch streams that use the "LGBTQIA+" tag that would be interested in participating in an interview about their experiences. Recruitment took place on Facebook, making a public post on my personal Facebook account, Twitter, using my professional account, and on Reddit, using my personal account and posting some text summarizing the study along with a flier with more details as well as a link and QR code to a survey where potential participants could fill out their information so that I could reach out to them. The survey described the interview portion of the study and asked respondents their name, email, whether they are a streamer, viewer, or both, and confirm that they are at least 19 years of age and qualify for the study.

I conducted 11 semi-structured interviews that were planned to not last for more than one hour. If an hour has passed and there are some questions I did not get to, participants were offered an opportunity to do a second interview and had a choice on whether they wanted to or not. The interview questions had four sections: demographic information, video game culture and Twitch, LGBT identity, and, depending on whether

the participant is a streamer or solely a viewer, a section on streaming or viewing streams on Twitch (see Appendix D).

The eleven participants in this study were all streamers on Twitch who also spend some of their time watching other streamers. The average age of these participants was around 29 years old with the youngest being 22 years old and the oldest being 40. Most of the participants were white with two participants that identify as Mexican American or Hispanic, one as Filipino, and one as Chinese. Most participants were located within the United States with three from the southern region, two from the eastern region, three from the western region, and one from the Midwest. As for the participants that lived outside the United States, one lived in Canada and the other lived in Southeastern Asia. Within all these locations, most participants lived in either urban, suburban, or a mixture of both types of areas with only one participant in a rural area currently.

As for the identities within the LGBT community, five participants identified themselves as bisexual, four as either gay or lesbian, one as queer, one as “ace” (a term used to indicate that they are asexual and/or aromantic), and one as pansexual. As for gender, four of the participants said that they were non-binary, two of which also said they were genderfluid, three who said they were male, one of whom was also questioning their gender at the time, three who said they were female or a woman, and one that said they were gender apathetic (see Appendix A for a list of the participants).

IRB and Ethical Considerations

This project was approved with exempt status by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board (IRB). One of the main questions regarding this

research is whether a streamer who goes onto the website which anyone can view, whether they have a Twitch account or not, should be anonymized. Would the same apply to viewers in the chat? An important factor that affects this is how the streamer is shown on stream, yet viewers have usernames which, unless they choose to put personal information in their username, would not include personal identifying information. There is also the fact that to have a Twitch account, people must be 13 or older (Twitch, 2020f) and there is no way to check the age of each viewer that participates in the chat during the live stream.

To provide the best amount of anonymity possible and align with the Association of Internet Researchers' (2019) guidelines, the streamers will be shown as they are streaming in a public online space. The viewers, on the other hand, will be anonymized if their usernames or any of the messages they send include any identifiable information. With streamers, it is easier to see whether they are old enough to have a Twitch account according to Twitch's Terms of Service (Twitch, 2020f), but we cannot say the same for viewers in the chat, assuming that there is a good chance of a viewer of being younger than 19 years of age. Making this assumption and anonymizing identifiable information from the viewers in chat, whether we know their age or not, provides that extra level of security just in case an instance like that were to occur.

Digital media produces some gray areas regarding what is considered public or private spaces (Hine 2000). Following the guidelines provided by the Association of Internet Researchers (2019), I believe that, in this case, the streams and messages from the viewers in the chat should be treated as public places, thus not requiring that I

announce my presence on the site. There are some Twitch streams that are considered private or have follower- and subscriber-only chats, but they will not be observed or analyzed for this study. The ones that will be observed with be ones that have public streams and messages in the chat that does not require a Twitch account to see.

As for the interviews, participants were given an Informed Consent file within our email correspondences that stated that, at the beginning of the interview, I will ask for their consent (see Appendix E). Documents with data from the interviews have identifying information taken out and a number assigned to that participant that will appear on those documents. Those documents are stored on my password-protected computer and de-identified data will be stored on Box through the university account which is the approved cloud storage system by the UNL IRB. The files with the data are password protected with a unique password for every participant and there is a printed document with the ID numbers and associated passcodes that will be stored in a locked place.

Data Analysis

Memos from both observations and interviews, interview transcripts, and screenshots of the streams and messages in chat were coded for common themes using NVivo 12. They were coded using within-case coding by looking at the common themes within a single observation session or interview. Then with cross-case coding by looking at the common themes across all observations, interviews, and other forms of data. I will use NVivo's autocode function to double check afterward and see if there are any

potential codes that were possibly overlooked or to see if I have all the potential codes that could help gain insight into the interactions within these streams as possible.

Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I collected data, then analyze some of the materials, see if there is anything that I may need to look for in my observations and interviews. Then, I would collect data again, then analyze it again, going through the cycle until it feels like everything can be accounted for or that theoretical saturation has been achieved (Merriam and Tisdell 2016).

Validity and Rigor of Research Design

With qualitative research, there is the question of whether findings are valid or generalizable (Creswell and Poth 2018; Merriam and Tisdell 2016). However, many of the common ideas around validity and generalizability applies best to quantitative methods that analyze the frequency of certain behaviors, ideas, or opinions and allow for larger sample sizes. Qualitative research, on the other hand, focuses on the experiences within the phenomenon as well as words and images which is not easily quantifiable and rely on description (Bogdan and Biklen 2007; Creswell and Poth 2018; Merriam and Tisdell 2016) . This requires different data collection and analyzation methods that do not allow for large sample sizes. However, it is possible to have theoretical saturation with 11 interviews and the main focus, which cannot be quantified, is the experiences within these interactions for streams that use the “LGBTQIA+” tag.

Researcher Positioning and Reflexivity

As the researcher conducting the study that is observing these streams and interviewing streamers and viewers, it is important that I consider characteristics about myself that could create some implicit biases that I may not be aware of or could

influence my perspectives of the findings within this research. However, some of these characteristics could help provide some insight into the research that those who do not have the characteristics may not think about.

I, myself, am a second-year master's student studying Sociology who grew up in rural Illinois and attended a small high school where most of the students were white and came from conservative-leaning upper-middle class families during the early 2010s. At that high school, LGBT topics were considered negative in some sense. Many did not explicitly state any hatred towards the community, but there were more microaggressions, jokes, and statements such as "love the sinner, hate the sin." Gay-straight alliances or LGBT groups were not formed until a couple of years after I had graduated in 2014. While my family was largely supportive, there were many that did not have the same attitudes towards LGBT people or many other marginalized identities.

As someone who is part of the LGBT community as queer and non-binary, I have some insights into how to find LGBT spaces both geographically and online. My interest in video games and live streaming also help provide some insight into the way that Twitch and other websites that focus on video game culture work and how people in the community might act. Having these identities should also help me be able to relate to the people I interview as many LGBT people may not be open to those who are straight and/or cisgender.

As a person who is white, born in the United States, and in my late-20s, I am also aware of potential biases from my observations. My reactions and analysis may differ from someone who is not white, may not have lived in the United States, or who is in a

different age range. In my memos, I try to list every observation that is notable to me as well as opinions that I thought of that could potentially be from my implicit biases.

Findings

A common theme my findings reveal is how insider and outsider status are formed within streamers' communities that use the LGBTQIA+ tag to prevent the type of online harassment that people who do not fit the "true gamer" stereotype face. Many of the boundaries set by streamers that use the LGBTQIA+ tag include rules their viewers need to abide by to use their chat during the stream, moderators that give warnings to people who break one of the rules or ban people from using the chat. Streamers that use the tag will also use the tag itself as an identifier that they are part of the LGBTQIA+ community and/or that the streamer and their community provide a safe space for LGBT people who want to avoid the toxicity of video game culture as well as the overall marginalization of LGBT people. These boundaries take the insider and outsider roles within video game culture and inverses them and the interactions within these streamers' communities help maintain them.

In this section, I discuss four themes found in the data from observations and interviews. The first talks about the individual, what the LGBTQIA+ tag means to streamers, how it is used to indicate their LGBT identity to themselves and others, and other forms of presentation used to indicate their LGBT identity. The second theme focuses on insiders which, in this case, are the LGBT streamers and viewers within Twitch streams with the LGBTQIA+ tag. The section discusses the tag's meaning to LGBT people who are searching for these tagged streams to find a safe place where their

identities are validated, and they do not have to answer questions about their identity constantly. The third theme is like the second theme but, instead of discussing the meaning of the LGBTQIA+ tag to insiders, it focuses on the meaning of the tag to outsiders such as those who are not part of the LGBT community and trolls. As well, this section also discusses the experiences that LGBT people face within video game culture that make them feel like outsiders. The fourth theme focuses on both insider and outsider roles and how the boundaries between them are not clear cut. This includes viewers who do not initially search for streams that use the LGBTQIA+ tag, streamers' overlays that do not use LGBT imagery or show themselves on their stream, and how allies using the LGBTQIA+ tag conflicts with the expectations of the LGBTQIA+ tag and the ability to maintain boundaries.

Individual

For individual streamers, the LGBTQIA+ tag is used as an identifier of the streamer's LGBT identity or identities without saying what it specifically is. The tag is all encompassing of the whole LGBTQIA+ community and does not require the streamer to specify which part of the community they are part of to use it. Some participants said that they started to use the tag to identify themselves as well as come out as part of the community in a more subtle way or, according to Samuel, a 40-year-old Hispanic bisexual non-binary person located in the southern region of the United States, "It's because I wanted to say, 'this is who I am,' but I wasn't ready to say, 'this is who I am'." The tag created an opportunity for those who either want to come out as part of the LGBT community slowly and subtly or not have their identity attract too much attention.

An, a 31-year-old Chinese lesbian located in Southeastern Asia, for instance, said she did not want to explicitly say she was part of the LGBT community because, in her words, she does not “want to put it […] like really up front and center” and “I don’t think that’s really my style.”

There are also streamers who use the tag to be more upfront and about their LGBT identity like Em, a 24-year-old white non-binary lesbian located in the eastern region of the United States, who said, "I used the tag just...first of all, just so people know, if the new people are in [the chat], you know, straight up, I am part of this community. You were right about the fact that I have a shaved head. You were correct about that assumption." They use it as an identifier to signal to the viewers in the chat without requiring them to explain to newer viewers repeatedly. They also said this jokingly, noting that they might look like the stereotype of an LGBT person, and that they are fine with that. Along with indicating their identity, participants also mentioned that they use it to advertise their streams and be able to reach more people through Twitch. Brandon, a 27-year-old white gay man located in the southern region of the United States, justified his use of the tag with advertising in mind saying, "the more tags that you use, the more likely that your stream is going to be found" and that, because he openly identifies as a gay man, that it is a tag that can be used for any stream.

Symbolic interactionists theorize that symbols of identification and their meanings can influence the types of interactions that people can have with each other as we act toward things on the basis of their meanings (Blumer 1969). For instance, with this tag as an identifier of one's LGBT identity, viewers who see the tag may influence

how they will interact with the streamer. Sean, a 26-year-old white queer gender apathetic person located in the western region of the United States, is aware of how the tag could influence their interactions with viewers. This awareness is the reason why they use the tag: "to try and cultivate that particular atmosphere within my own streams for my viewers" because "it is a part of me, it influences a lot of the ways that I see the world either through my own experiences or my own desire to read sociological works that have helped me understand my own life positions." Being aware of these perspectives and how identity influences them helps with understanding how the tag is interpreted by potential viewers and can be used to build LGBT-affirming communities.

Along with the tag, presentation also plays a major role in how one signifies their identity in the LGBT community. Unlike the tag, these are more indirect approaches and requires previous knowledge on what those aspects signify within the LGBT community, knowledge that, as Merton (1972) would say, they have as insiders. Streamers think about their appearance on stream because their viewers will see them and form their interpretations of the streamer to assess if they are really LGBT-friendly. Jordan, a 26-year-old Mexican American bisexual man located in the southern region of the United States, talks about this regarding how he wants his viewers to see him:

> I'll wear more flamboyant clothing when I'm on stream [and] make more flamboyant jokes. […] I recently dyed my hair and that's, before that, I think I feel like even that kind of gives off my more queer identity. And I want that to be more, my brand is not like, you know, I don't want it to seem like, 'Oh, he could

> be straight' or like, I want people to know that I'm proud of who I am and […] I'll demonstrate it in my stream.

For that person, this aspect of their appearance shows who they are which happens to be in-line with some of what people may associate with the LGBT community. This instance and many other types of presentations and interactions may involve a more "performative" self on stream. Performative, in this case, does not necessarily mean inauthentic, but is, as Jamie, a 36-year-old white bisexual woman located in the western region of the United States, puts it, more focused on what streamers act like and share about themselves online:

> How I'm acting now is how I act both on my streams, mostly, and in person. On my streams, admittedly, there tends to be a little bit more of a performance mindset if you will, because I am here to talk to people. I mean, I purposely have the setup with that big ass flag to let people know of what I, you know, who I am, but admittedly, like online, there's just days where my head's not in the best space and if I'm streaming, that's reflective, but […] if I can suppress negative emotion for a stream, I have done that in the past.

Much like Jordan, Jamie is aware of how she presents herself online with a trans flag in the background, but also notes a difference between herself online and herself in-person as well as how the two settings require different ways to present oneself to make live streaming and interacting with her viewers on stream work. And there is still a sense of authenticity in these live streams, which Max, a 24-year-old white bisexual, ace, and questioning non-binary and genderfluid person located in the eastern region of the United

States," states is because they think “it's really easy to see through the facades or see who's really true to their content, who's an authentic person by actually sitting down and interacting with the people at their streams because I'm of the belief it's pretty hard to really fake it for so many hours at a time behind a camera actually showing your face to people.” This shows that there are aspects of live streaming that require authenticity and, even though there are some performance aspects, playing the games and interacting with viewers in the chat cannot be fully scripted.

The use of LGBT images is also a part of the presentation of a streamer's identity within the LGBT community on their streams. This can be seen in their overlays, the icons, boxes, and images that are part of that streamer's branding or help broadcast both the streamer and their gameplay. Some streamers may include references to the LGBT community either by using the colors from the pride flags or by using pop culture references as Jordan with the rainbow flag and Jamie’s with the trans pride flag, that are

part of the mis-en-scene or the way they arranged their settings. There were some streams that had LGBT imagery within their streams projected onto their overlays (image 4).

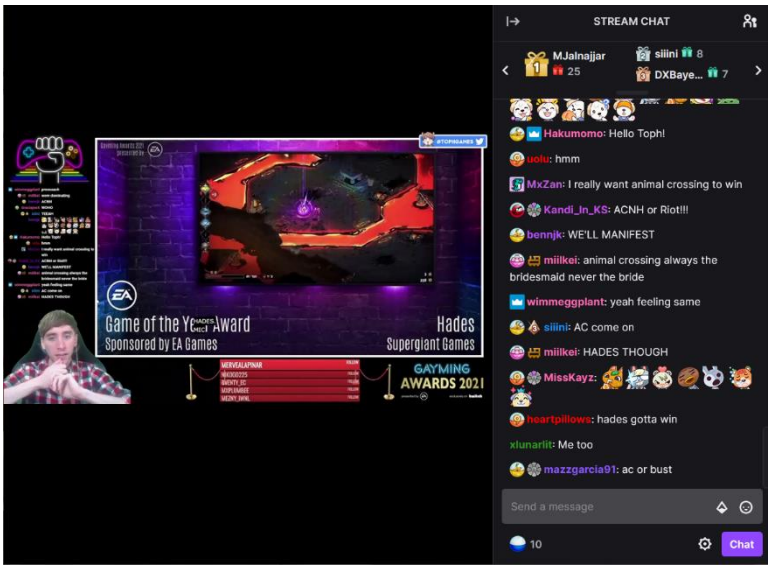

Image 4. A screenshot of Toph's stream co-hosting the Gayming Awards 2021 taken on February 24th, 2021

A streamer's "about me" section can also be a place where they can subtly indicate their identity within the LGBT community in the same way the overlay does, using LGBT imagery and colors. These sections can also be direct if the streamer mentions their identity. In this section, we can also see what their rules and guidelines are, who they are associated with, as well as other information they want to present to their viewers. Posting the rules in an area that is visible provides a place for people to find the boundaries and know what behaviors are and are not tolerated in that streamer's space.

One other aspect of these streams where LGBT identity can be expressed is through the emotes. There are basic emotes that everyone on Twitch regardless of if they subscribed to any streamers or not, can use. Then there are emotes that are available to viewers who are subscribed to the streamer like the ones depicted in Image 5 of Wyld's

Image 5. A screenshot of Wyld's subscription information taken on October 17th, 2020

emotes. These could be LGBT related using the pride flag or use some other aspect of LGBT culture. This can depend on what the streamer decides to do as well as Twitch for their emotes, so the viewers do not have control over some of the boundaries and must use what is given to them. For those that do use the emotes, they can use them as part of their interactions with streamers and viewers in the chat either through conversations or, for example, when a new person subscribes to that streamer's channel, the streamer will say something along the lines of "we have a new subscriber, can I get some hearts [or other emote] in the chat for them" and the viewers will use them as a way to welcome new subscribers into the channel.

There is another type of icon that influences the interactions between streamers and viewers but does not necessarily have to do with LGBT identity. These are the icons that subscribers have next to their usernames in the chat showing that they are subscribers and even how long they subscribed to a streamer based on months. To show the number

of months subscribed, the icons sometimes change either into different colors or, using Wyld's stream as an example who has emotes for his subscribers who subscribed for one month that have an icon of a half-filled red heart, six months with a filled red heart, a year with a filled yellow heart, two years with a filled green and yellow gradient heart, and three years with a filled blue and green gradient heart (image 5). Depending on how large the viewer count is, many of the viewers using the chat had these icons indicating

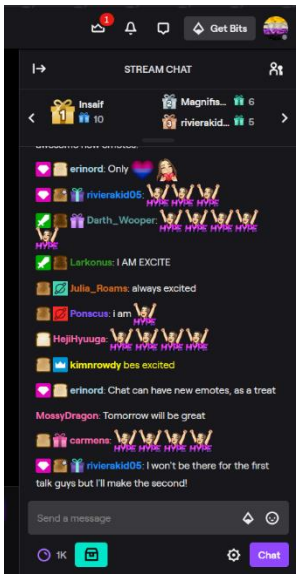

Image 6. A screenshot of Kate's chat during a stream taken on August 26th,

their subscriber status (image 6). The smaller streams I observed did not have as many viewers with subscriber icons next to their usernames. This is likely because, to have subscribers, a streamer must reach Twitch affiliate or partner status by streaming for a certain number of hours and have at least 50 followers on their channel.

Insiders

The LGBTQIA+ tag, to the insiders, or the LGBT people looking for LGBT-affirming streams, symbolizes that the stream should be a safe place without anti-LGBT

sentiments or harassment or, as Jordan says, “it really is that safety net of knowing there’s a tag for it, there’s a place for it, it’s valid and you feel validated knowing that rather than trying to hide.” Jordan and Jamie said the tag and most streams with the tag provided that safe place to be able to exist without having their identities be a huge factor and be able to talk about video games, talk about experiences within the LGBT community and get input from someone who is a part of the community, and know that the streamer’s community will also be supportive. Jordan compares the tag, its use compared to streams that do not have the tag, and the safety it provides with gay bars saying,

> I typically don’t want to go to a normal bar because I feel like I have to stand more straight up. I have to look a certain way, you know, not fidget too much, not lean my hip too much. Like it’s sad, but that’s the reality that we live in. Even if I’m in […] a very gay city, it doesn’t matter. Like I always feel like I have a target on my back and at a gay bar at least I know that everyone kind of expects me to be gay, so it’s fine. You know, we all kind of fidget or we do this or that, it doesn’t matter as much. There’s still gonna be people that kind of judge for little things, but it’s like the gay bar of Twitch having the tag on.

Knowing that everyone else in the community, including the streamer, can help a viewer feel more welcome and safer, an LGBT viewer who may have questions about their own identity or some of their experiences would be willing to talk about them in those spaces. This aligns with Gray’s (2009) research on rural LGBT and allied youth in that viewers

are watching streamers that use the LGBTQIA+ tag to find real people and hear their real-life experiences.

Justine, a 22-year-old Filipino bisexual non-binary and genderfluid person located in the western region of the United States, mentions the uneasiness that comes from having to gauge whether a streamer and their community will be understanding of LGBT issues and not have to explain what Justine refers to as the "basic questions" when the tag is not used or have a streamer who is not part of the LGBT community. Em, in explaining their uneasiness, said that it comes from the possibility that the streamer is "going to mess up a little bit sometimes" even if they are an ally. The tag takes away that uneasiness because, as Justine says, they can "kind of expect that that community will have a basic understanding of LGBTQ stuff instead of having to be surrounded by basic questions or anything."

Many streamers and viewers do talk about their experiences within these streams. An stated that she and her viewers are able to have conversations about their "coming out struggles and people who have to stay in the closet in their real life, […] how being trans can be really hard, et cetera" and that streams without the tag are more along the lines of "don't ask, don't tell" and saying that many may identify those streams as "not being a safe space to talk about this kind of stuff." She says that the reason behind that is not that people will not sympathize with you, but that "even if they do sympathize, it can feel disingenuous or it can feel like, 'Oh yeah, I know what's that's like,' but they actually don't know what that's like."

Without that experience of being part of the LGBT community, it is hard for people to relate to LGBT viewers which is why they may look for the LGBTQIA+ tag and search for those LGBT streamers and their communities. Being in those communities with the ability to share can be beneficial as I noticed in my observations on two streams, one where a viewer said that they were thankful for the streamer and their community and came out as pansexual. They were met with other viewers who congratulated them and used the pansexual pride emotes. Another instance was in a stream for a drag queen who was co-hosting Twitch's first Gaymer Awards in 2021 and who was nominated for

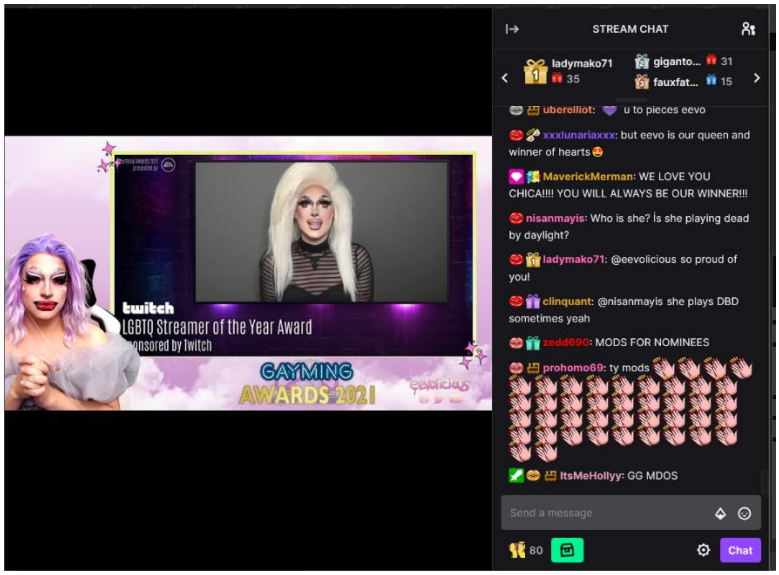

Image 7. A screenshot of Eevolicious's stream co-hosting the Gayming Awards 2021 taken on February 24th, 2021

an award with other LGBTQIA+ streamers. Even though they did not win the award, their viewers congratulated them and said that they were number one in their hearts (image 7). Later in that stream, the streamer talked about how much progress has been made for the LGBT community and how the awards show was part of it as well as the representation of gay and trans characters in video games.

Even though the tag helps signal that their streams should be safe places for LGBT viewers, streamers keep the importance of safety in mind with the other aspects of their streams. Half of the participants drew from their own experiences in what being an LGBT person is like when elaborating on why they keep safety in mind on their streams and want to make things better for their viewers. Brandon drew from politics and how policies can affect LGBT people. Samuel remembered being in the position of the viewer who may need to reach out to someone and attempted suicide. Max relates to mental health struggles as well as LGBT issues and wants to provide a space for people who are "struggling or just want to have an open forum discussion in the middle of a game." Aligning with Blumer's (1969) first and second premises, the streamers' experiences in person influence the symbols and social interactions they have within their streams online.

Within these streams, many of the conversations between streamers and viewers are about the video game that the streamer is playing or, with the Chat's Choice Awards and the Gaymer Awards, the event the streamer is co-hosting. This includes talking about the game itself, feelings on new updates, the mods, or the modifications that players will add to their games, or on other video games with content from the game that the streamer is playing. One instance of this was during Wyld's stream where the streamer and viewers talked about Minecraft and the features and past updates they liked or hated. Viewers would share information with other viewers if they felt it was relevant. Usually, this would be when viewers ask the streamer and other viewers if they heard about a new

update or event that a video game company announced for the game which then starts a conversation.

There are also games with interactive components where viewers can play alongside the streamer. This aligns with Taylor's (2018) "networked broadcast" where the viewers contribute to the entertainment on stream. Common games that streamers play with their viewers include the *Jackbox Party Pack* series which include multiple games and their own spin on trivia, fill in the blank prompts, drawing prompts, impromptu presentations, and other types of games. Samuel and Brandon said that they either had or were planning on playing this with their viewers. There is also *Marbles on Stream* which only requires that the streamer have the game and viewers can play using the !play command in the streamer's chat. The object of the game is to claim a marble and then race your marble with other marbles down a track. Victor, a 31-year-old white gay man (who is also questioning his gender) located in Canada, describes playing this game with his viewers as part of his "community day" streams on Sundays and sometimes has giveaways for viewers whose marble wins a race. Both these games and others like it let viewers become part of the entertainment within the stream, resembling the "networked broadcast" that Taylor (2018) mentions.

For the Chat's Choice Awards show, there were interactive games like *Marbles on Stream* where each raptor in a raptor race was a streamer who was a co-host during the awards show and that streamer's viewers got to vote on customization options for a raptor as part of a raptor race (image 8). Once those options are picked, then the raptors go

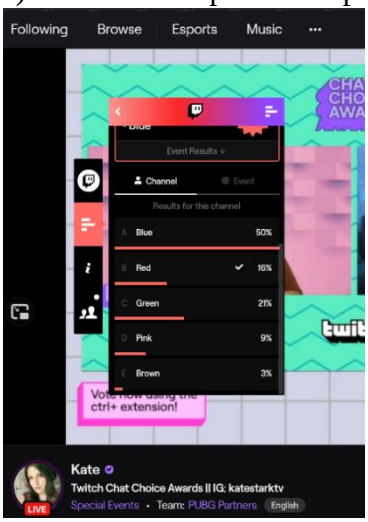

Image 8. A screenshot of one of the polls for customizing the raptor for the raptor race as part of the Chat's Choice Awards taken on September 3rd, 2020

through obstacle courses and the streamer whose community wins the race gets Twitch subscriptions gifted to them (image 9).

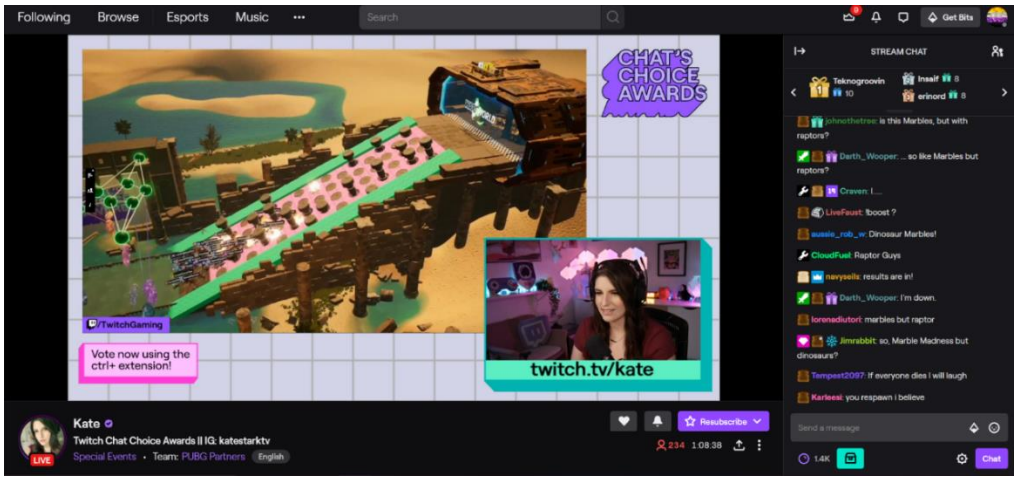

Image 9. A screenshot of Kate's stream cheering on her and her community's raptor during the Chat's Choice Awards raptor races taken on September 3rd, 2020

Even if a game does not have an interaction element, some streamers will add ways for their viewers to interact such as WitchyTQ. She plays *Animal Crossing: New Horizons* on her stream and has a "community island" where she lets her viewers have a say on where trees or decorations should go as well as which villager they want on the island. While the game does include ways to interact with other players online, it is limited to eight people and, unless you are playing with other people in your household, you do not get to share an island. This way of including the viewers in the building of an island could also be an example of a "networked broadcast" and how viewers contribute to the entertainment of the stream (Taylor 2018).

In the discussion on these streams, streamers and viewers talked about pop culture which was sometimes brought up by a viewer who asked the streamer if they watched a certain show or saw a popular meme, was brought up in the video game the streamer is playing, or the streamer brought it up and asked their viewers about it and their thoughts. This happened in Yuma_Yamano's stream when one of her viewers asked if she was aware of a meme (image 10). This led to a whole conversation around the meme that the

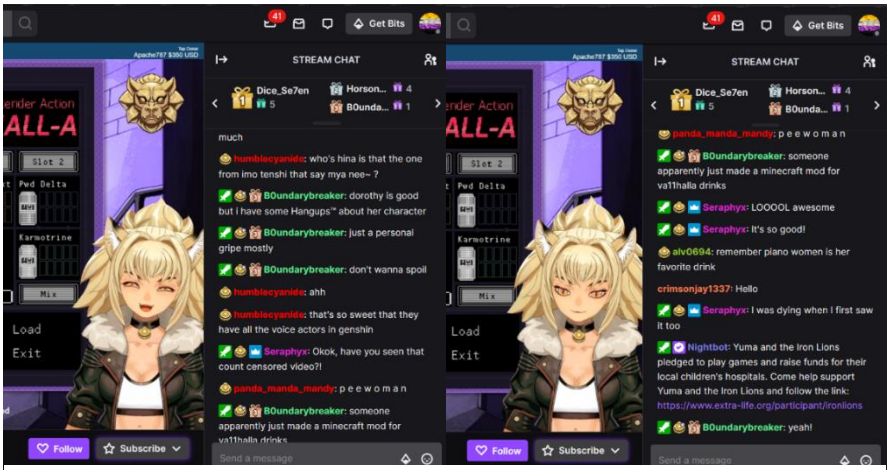

Image 10. Two screenshots of Yuma_Yamano's stream and chat taken on October 17th, 2020

streamer had with her viewers while playing the game. These interactions help create these connections between the streamer and their viewers as well as the viewer with other viewers.

Another common topic within these conversations were social issues and topics. There were two streams I observed where the topic of race was brought up. One instance was during the Chat's Choice Awards on ctrlaltquin's stream when one of the presenters was a streamer that was involved in a controversial emote that got added to Twitch known as the TriHard emote. She talked about how the emote started as a meme of that streamer trying to get the attention of a Twitch staff member that was in his chat, then turned into an emote that was used to harass people of color. According to Alexander (2018), the TriHard emote was used to "spam the screen" or fill the chat with messages that mainly consist of that emote whenever a black streamer appeared and included racist comments. There was another conversation on Ysbrydgames' stream on how racism is present in Japan and one of the viewers did not believe it and thought that Japan was very accepting of people of color. One of the moderators then talked to that viewer in the chat about how Japan does have racism, but that it was not presented the same way we would see racism in America. Throughout this conversation, the viewer was respectful, seemed to understand what the moderator was saying, and learned something new. These conversations do more than just promote interactions between streamers and viewers for entertainment, but also help provide knowledge to viewers who may not be aware of certain issues or certain terms.

Within social issues, many of the conversations focused on LGBT topics and issues through talking about their experiences, questions on sexuality or gender identity, and LGBT pop culture such as *RuPaul's Drag Race.* Some participants stated that they would talk about LGBT identity and experiences and even be willing to help someone figure out their identity or solutions to their problems. Some participants stated that they would talk about LGBT identity and experiences and even be willing to help someone figure out their identity or solutions to their problems. For instance, Jamie talks about how, if someone types in the chat saying that they had a question on something LGBT related, they would be happy to stop whatever she is doing on stream and take the time to either answer or look for answers to their question. Some participants like Jamie would be happy to because they want to be that person that helps them. One reason that many participants stated as to why they do this is because they want to be there especially considering that there is a possibility that the person may not have that community around them.

Many of the participants, when I asked them why they started streaming, said they wanted to be in a community and feel like they are connected to the LGBT community, especially when they are in places where an LGBT-affirming is hard to find or when there are restrictions on socializing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, most of the participants for this study said that they started streaming because of the pandemic. Jamie relates the LGBTQIA+ tag to community, but in a different way stating how the tag is a way to be connected to everyone as a whole community, saying,

> I guess, my best way to put it would be, when I stream with that, I feel like I'm bringing my little ship of who I am and docking it into this big mothership that is the tag as a whole. There are streamers I follow who are trans. There are streamers that I follow who are gay or lesbian. There are streamers who are bi. Each one brings their own unique thing to the table. […] I feel more connected to them through the tag and anytime I'm looking at a game or looking for someone to raid, that is always the first tag that I look up because I want to support other people in the community, and I've made some good friends through that.

Community is an important factor and the connections that are made through these streams provide that. This spans outsider of just the interactions between streamers and viewers, but also between streamers and other streamers.

The interactions between streamers and viewers regarding viewers saying something to the streamer also contribute to this concept of a community. Em, Samuel, and Max appreciate when viewers state that they are looking forward to the stream, use the emotes the streamer made, for streamers who are trans using their correct pronouns, or when they come out to the streamer and go through that process of finding out who they are. These moments indicate affirmation coming from the viewers, emphasizing their role in maintaining the community as well.

Now it is important to note that these interactions do not start and end with the live streams. Many streamers use other sites to manage their communities, one of the most common ones being Discord through a Discord server. Discord is a website where communities can come in and participate in "channels," or chat areas specifically tailored

to a topic, and talk to each other about their interests. In fact, many streamers communicate with each other through their own Discord servers and channels. Jamie, Victor, and Em mentioned how they met streamers or their online friends through these Discord servers and how they made those connections regarding their Twitch stream. In fact, Em mentions that there are people who do not use the LGBTQIA+ tag that they trust because they are from the Discord they chat in a lot and "a bunch of people I knew from that discord started streaming and so a lot of the people I watch are from basically the same community" and that "the streamers [from that Discord community] who don't use that tag are going to be the same because it's a very LGBT heavy community." These Discord servers range from being open to anyone, typically a streamer's community, like what Victor has, where viewers can have conversations and events where they will play games with each other, with other viewers and the streamer through multiple channels depending on the topic the channel is set for, to completely private like one of the servers that Jamie has for her friends specifically that she is "willing to let [her] guard down with."

Outsiders

There is another meaning associated with the LGBTQIA+ tag which is that it could attract "trolls," or viewers who come into a stream with the intent to harass LGBT streamers and viewers. In my observations, I did not encounter a lot of harassment in the streams that used the tag except for one instance. During the Gaymer Awards, one of the streamers I observed who was co-hosting responded to someone in the chat who typed, "I'm anti-LGBT." The streamer responded back quickly saying, "Well, I'm anti-asshole"

followed by blocking the viewer and deleting their message in the chat. There were other messages that appeared, but the moderators deleted the messages so quickly that I was unable to read them as seen in image three. This example of swiftly applied boundaries aligns with the research found on trolls online and within video game culture in that the streamer's identity within the LGBTQIA+ community was a factor as was that viewer's identity as someone who is anti-LGBT (Evans and Janish 2015; Paaßen et al. 2017; Shaw 2012; Taylor 2018).

Many participants mentioned their worries about the tag attracting trolls and their experiences with them and harassment campaigns. Some participants like Justine and Lindsey, a 30-year-old white pansexual trans woman located in the midwestern region of the United States, had concerns but were surprised to see that they did not receive much harassment in their streams. Lindsey said that they still had to ban a few people, but "expected much worse." Some of these instances include an intrusion of privacy like Samuel who had a viewer ask for their phone number, sexism, racism, and large harassment campaigns, but the common theme for all these instances relies on the LGBTQIA+ tag since that is how they found those streamers. These instances align with previous research on the "true gamer" stereotype and what happens when someone who does not fit that image is present within video game culture (Evans and Janish 2015; Paaßen et al. 2017; Ruberg, Cullen, and Brewster 2019; Taylor 2018).

Gender and "gendertrolling" (Mantilla 2013) plays a role in this harassment as An noted saying some viewers have commented on her appearance during her streams. She noticed that those comments may have related to her gender identity and presentation and

stated, “I can tell a lot of these people that come in are straight men” then laughs, “because, I mean, the things they say, I don’t feel like any other demographic has the…you know?” This association of identity with the behavior exhibited by the viewers shows some of the insider-outsider dynamics within video game culture and how those with the insider status in video game culture create conflicts (Merton 1972). This is also an example of the ways that gender affects the video game experience for people (Taylor 2018).

As for how race plays a role, it is still a major influence no matter if a person is in a stream with the tag or without. An, when asked if people within video game culture tend to be accepting of LGBT people, said that many people know it is not okay to be anti-LGBT. However, she noted that “*now* we’ve moved onto racism is okay, but LGBT+ prejudice is not okay.” When I asked her to elaborate, she told me about times when viewers made racial comments towards her like calling her “Ching Chong” a lot and, in one game, there was a part where the player can die due to bats. One of her viewers commented saying, “Oh, it’s so typical for the Asian to die to bats.” And there was another instance where she was a viewer on a different stream and asked for a recipe for a soup from Turkey that they were talking about. Someone commented saying “we use all parts of the animal, like it involves some animal heads” and that “we Turks very not wasteful.” An responded to this saying, “I think the Chinese are the same, we use every part of the animal. It’s just not very wasteful.” The person responded attacking her saying, “you, China eat everything and that is filthy and disgusting. We only eat halal

meat, please do not compare us Turks to that scum." She then mentioned that the level of racism she experiences have not changed since she was a kid.

As for large harassment campaigns, these are trickier to deal with and, while streamers are aware of these instances, depending on the acts taken, the people in these campaigns are harder to manage with the tools that Twitch gives them to use. Victor mentions a moment where they saw a streamer friend of theirs try to deal with the harassment they received on their stream:

> "I've been in very popular streamers' [streams] when one [streamer], who accidentally had text-to-speech on in his chat, […] someone came in and just text-to-speech thousand of hate speech words. And it started playing them over his stream and he couldn't figure out how to continue playing his game. While doing this, his mods couldn't help him easily because they didn't know what was going on."

Instances like this do make streamers wonder about Twitch's moderation tools and whether they do enough to maintain the boundaries needed to provide a safe place for LGBT viewers and a way to keep the trolls out. Em, for instance, mentions how Twitch's moderation tools only give streamers control over who can use the chat on stream and is concerned about how people that are banned from the chat can still view the stream. This shows how, while streamers do have control over the chat and their guidelines, Twitch has higher power in boundary making and maintaining that on their site which, in instances like what Victor witnessed and the concerns that Em has, can be

counterintuitive, especially for people using the LGBTQIA+ tag who need more control over what trolls and others with malicious intent can and cannot see.

Though this study does not include self-identified trolls, from the perspective of LGBT Twitch users, this tag is associated with breaking the norms around the "true gamer" stereotype and these trolls think that they should endure, as Evans and Janish (2015) mention, harassment and marginalization. To maintain a space that is free from online harassment and others that might disrupt the space, streamers need to have a plan regarding the moderation of their stream through the chat rules and Twitch's moderation tools. Using guidelines is one way that these LGBT streamers and their communities can inverse the insider-outsider roles associated with video game culture, turning LGBT people into the insiders who have their own spaces to talk about their interests without having to worry about being harassed because of their sexual orientation and/or their gender identity and those who fit the "true gamer" stereotype who would instigate this harassment as the outsiders.

The common rules that appeared on streams and that participants stated fall under two categories which I will call the "no phobias" rules and the "just be a decent human being" rules. The rules in the "no phobias" category consisted of rules like "no homophobia," "no sexism," and "no racism." Some of the participants said they use those rules to be straightforward. There can be some caveats to using these types of guidelines in that the list of rules can get long and as Jamie says, "I don't like it when I go to a chat and I see a litany of rules that I need to read through before I can say hi." This was her reasoning behind keeping her list down to four rules, three of which were, "be kind," "no

hatred allowed," and "listen to the mods." Others who tried to create a small list of rules want to keep it vague so that it could be broadly interpreted**.** Other participants follow a similar sentiment with using rules that can be broadly interpreted that are along the lines of "be a decent human being." Samuel has that in place for their stream because,

> If someone doesn't know what that means, I don't want them there anyway. I shouldn't have to delineate that. I shouldn't have to explain to you that calling somebody that is unacceptable […] I don't have to give a guidebook on being decent.

Many of them will allow swearing or some jokes depending on the context. Their rules are mainly geared towards creating a safe environment for LGBT streamers and viewers and keeping those who would harass them and create a toxic environment out.

As for using Twitch's moderation tools, almost all the participants said that they had a couple of friends or viewers as moderators so they can handle these situations if the streamer is busy, delete messages, mute, or ban people from talking in the chat if needed. These moderators have a green sword icon next to their names in the chat so viewers will know if they are there and possibly asking questions. They then have access to these moderation tools on Twitch and have the authority to either mute a viewer (restrict them from typing in the chat for a certain amount of time), delete a message a viewer posted in the chat, and ban a viewer from using the chat on the stream entirely.

Many of the participants I interviewed said that, when they see someone in their chat who could be a potential "troll" and is asking a question or making a statement that breaks their guidelines, will likely try to educate the viewer and why their question or

statement may be inaccurate or hurtful as well as why they do not like that in their chat during streams. Then, depending on the viewer and how they respond, the viewer would either understand and apologize or, if they continue with the behavior, are banned from using the chat during the stream. Those that understand and say they will not act that like that again may affect the insider-outsider relationship in that their status as the outsider, even though they are still an outsider, may obtain more knowledge about the insiders and adjust their perspectives and make them rethink their previous prejudices.

Insiders/Outsiders…Blurring the Boundaries

Looking at what characteristics constitute being an insider or outsider is beneficial to understanding how boundaries are enforced. However, we should also look at the ways that those boundaries are blurred such as the tag and how many viewers do not initially search through the tag, overlays that do not include LGBT imagery, streamers that do not show themselves on their stream, and how allies interfere with the expectations of the LGBTQIA+ tag and the ability to maintain its boundaries.

While the tag itself is a good way to find these communities, many viewers do not automatically seek out the LGBTQIA+ tag right away. Brandon, Justine, and An said that, when they search for streams to watch and how their viewers have found them, they tend to focus primarily on the game that the streamer is playing. Then, if the LGBTQIA+ tag is on one of those streams, they consider it, as what An says, “a bonus.”

Many of the overlays that streamers use does not include LGBT imagery. While there are some that do, many streamers use another part of their own branding for the overlay. This could relate to how some streamers want to use the LGBTQIA+ tag to

subtly come out as part of the LGBT community. They may also use other means to indicate their LGBT identity such as the “About Me” page (images 11 and 12) or their

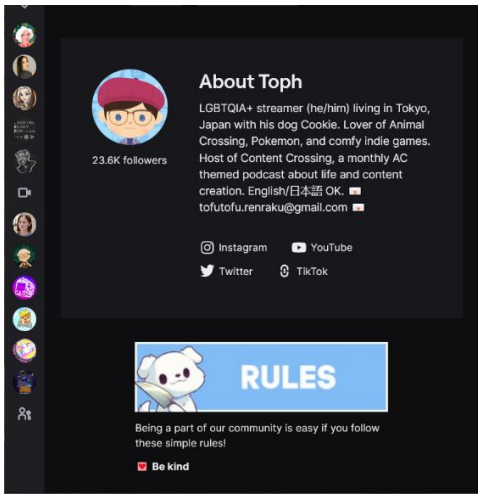

Image 11. A screenshot of Toph’s “About Me” section taken on February 24th, 2021

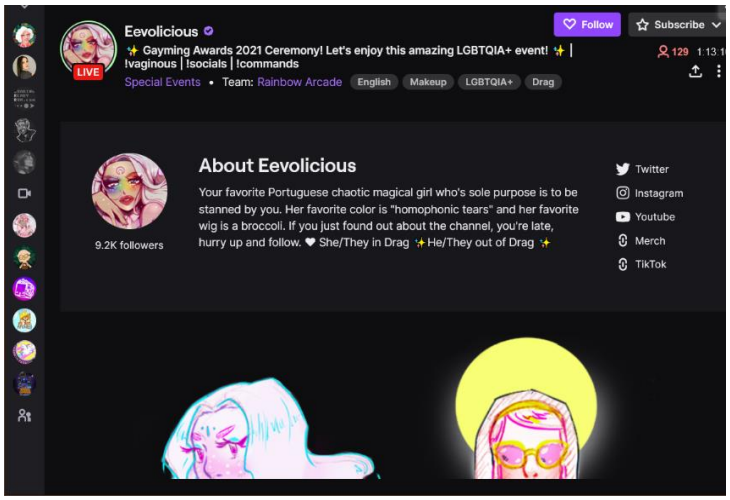

Image 12. A screenshot of Eevolicious’s “About Me” section taken on February 24th, 2021

emotes as seen in image 5.

Then there are streamers who either do not appear on streams as themselves or do not appear at all. Of those that do appear on stream, they either dressed in drag, as a character, or were “VTubers.” A new form of presentation that appeared on Twitch streams during these observations and the people associated with that form of

presentation are known as “VTubers.” VTubers are streamers who, instead appearing on the streams themselves, will have a 2D or 3D rendering of a character that may or may not resemble what the streamer looks like in real life and a program that tracks the streamer’s movements or speaking which will be projected onto the character on that appears on the stream.

Many of the interactions between the streamer and their viewers were like the ones between people who did show themselves on stream as well as those who were not on the stream. If there were any major differences, it would be viewers asking the streamer specific things about VTubing or other aspects of their presentation and as well as the overlay of the stream. Two of the VTubers I found had many aspects that were like many of the live streams on Twitch.

Both had characters that had an anime style with big eyes and brightly colored hair as their VTube personas and the ability to have their characters talk and act simultaneously with them. However, there is one difference between these two streamers regarding their presentation and overlay. Yuma_Yamano had an overlay that was very similar to the types seen on Twitch streams (image 13). Another VTuber, belbeeps, had

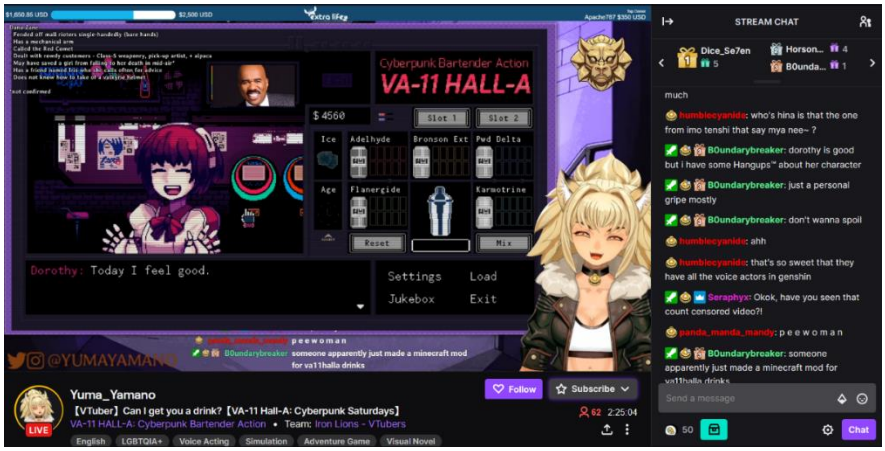

Image 13. A screenshot of Yuma_Yamano’s stream taken on October 17th, 2020

an artistic background and graphics that appeared when she wanted them such as what happened during the end of her stream when she changed the scene and a bed appeared behind the character and the blanket in the front through animation (image 14). Choosing

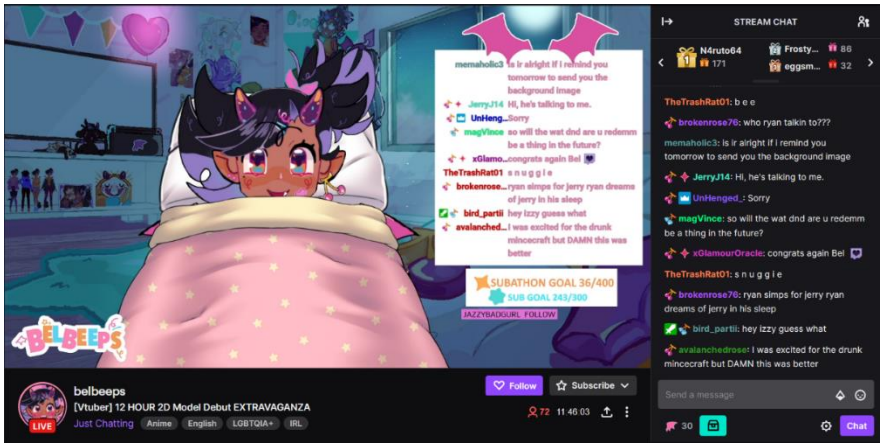

Image 14. A screenshot of belbeeps's stream taken on November 19th, 2020

cartoon avatars affords some anonymity online which could act as a protective boundary. Depending on how viewers feel about interacting with a 3D model versus a streamer showing their real-life selves.

For allies, unlike trolls, boundaries have their limits in maintaining the insider-outsider status that makes these spaces affirming for LGBT viewers and complicates the meaning behind the LGBTQIA+ tag. While it is easy to categorize trolls and those who blatantly do not follow the community's guidelines as outsiders, allies are also outsiders in that participants perceive them to potentially negatively influence some of the streams. Looking at allies, while they are not as malicious as "trolls" or disruptive like children, there are some things they do that causes complications with the meaning of the LGBTQIA+ tag and viewers' expectations of these streams. For instance, some participants mentioned that allies who use the LGBTQIA+ tag may go against the viewers' expectations that a streamer who uses the tag is part of the LGBTQIA+

community. This could then influence the streamer-viewer interactions that occur and if viewers can expect the knowledge and support from that streamer versus a streamer who is part of the LGBTQIA+ community and has similar life experiences as well. There is also a sense of community that viewers are looking for. Victor says that he "expect[s] a community" and, for self-identified allies that use the tag, does not "find that community there" and that a reason behind them using the tag may be "to gain viewership." Then, for Max, while they appreciate allies that use the tag for support or for charity streams benefiting LGBT people, there are some aspects of "performative allyship" and speaking over LGBT people that may negatively affect LGBT viewers' expectations of the use of the tag.

While this study did not purposefully include self-identified allies that use the tag, we do see that this usage complicates the boundaries and expectations of the LGBTQIA+ tag and leaves few options for viewers who want to find an LGBTQIA+ streamer. They can either stay or leave that stream and find another one. Then the likeliness of finding a streamer who is part of the LGBTQIA+ community and has experiences on that next stream is not 100% and requires work of the viewer who may be searching to find a community of LGBTQIA+ people online since the boundaries of the LGBTQIA+ tag is mainly set by the streamer.

One other aspect that complicates these boundaries is what Twitch as a company considers the LGBTQIA+ tag for. According to Twitch's (2020b) list of tags, the LGBTQIA+ tag is meant "[f]or streams in which the streamer chooses to identify as a member or ally of the LGBTQIA+ community." This definition is not stated in any other

places other than that page on Twitch, so it is possible that viewers and streamers are attaching their own interpretations to the tag, shifting its meaning from what Twitch originally intended it to be, but also creating confusion between LGBT people on the site and allies who want to use the tag.

Conclusion

We can conclude that setting boundaries using the LGBTQIA+ tag and maintaining communities through guidelines and moderation tools inverse the roles of the insiders and outsiders within video game culture, making those that fit the "true gamer" stereotype the outsiders instead of as the insiders in video game culture (Evans and Janish 2015; Paaßen et al. 2017). Part of creating these communities involves using the tag as an indicator of these spaces, but also as an indicator of the streamer's identity so that viewers know that they will be accepted as they are, and that harassment will not be tolerated.

These communities are maintained through a common interest in video games, interactions between streamers and viewers through discussions or interactive games, and have discussions around streamers' and viewers' everyday lives, pop culture, and social issues or major events. Throughout all these types of interactions, affirmation of one's identities should be maintained for both the streamer and the viewers. There are other means for maintaining a community outside of interactions which involve the presentation of the streamer as well as the overlays, "About Me" sections, and emotes. These act more as indirect ways to indicate one's identity within the LGBT community as

well as show that the stream is a safe place for LGBT people who want to talk about video games.

This study offers three contributions to the sociology of media and LGBTQ studies. First, the study contributes that the media itself acts as the mediator for these interactions online as the one commonality that ties these streamer-viewers interactions is itself the LGBTQIA+ tag on Twitch. It shows that having an identifier for live streams can help streamers present their LGBT identities as well as indicate that their streams are safe places for LGBT people who want to watch a streamer play a video game, chat, or something else without the fear of running into trolls online. This provides inclusive media spaces for LGBT people to talk about their experiences, aligning with Gray's (2009) research on rural LGBT and allied youth, as well as video games, current events, pop culture, or other relevant topics which aligns with the idea of the public sphere (Habermas 1991) within media spaces (Castells 1997).

This also extends on the ideas of symbolic interactionism and how our identities and experiences influence our interactions (Blumer 1969) within the context of the media and the Internet. The communities formed within these live streams on Twitch, like most forms of media (Lindner and Barnard 2020), involves sharing knowledge on other media with people either through conversation, consumption, or learning from friends within the community. These communities are also influenced by the interactions and experiences with video game and online culture which, at times, include "true gamers" and trolls which tend to harass LGBT people, women, and other marginalized people online (Cross 2014; Evans and Janish 2015; Lindner and Barnard 2020; Paaßen et al. 2017).

Second, it extends the research on boundaries and how insider and outsider status is maintained within the context of LGBT people, video game culture, and live streaming on Twitch. The findings on the LGBTQIA+ tag aligns with what Lamont and Molnar (2002) summarized on the research of boundary-work in the context of gender and sexualities. The streamers, doing the boundary-work such as enforcing rules and guidelines for their viewers as well as presenting themselves as part of the LGBT community on Twitch, influence the context that the symbolic boundaries that dictate who is considered an insider or an outsider. This is also maintained by the viewers following the guidelines and even explaining to others that break those guidelines what they did wrong.

However, this study also contradicts some of the previous research on boundaries by showing how the roles of insiders and outsiders are not so clear cut as the boundaries are blurred. This is seen through LGBT streamers who do not necessarily include LGBT images in their overlays or emotes, viewers who do not primarily look for streams with the LGBTQIA+ tag and primarily focus on the game streamers are playing, streamers who do not show themselves within their live streams or, with VTubers, use 2D or 3D renderings of their character, allies who use the LGBTQIA+ tag even though they are not part of the LGBT community, and Twitch who included language describing the LGBTQIA+ tag for streamers who are LGBT or allies of the community.

Third, this study expands on research in “networked broadcasts” through analyzing the interactions between streamers and viewers within the context of the LGBT community and the LGBTQIA+ tag and how they influence the dynamics of the stream

and the streamer's community. Many of the types of interactions found in this study aligned with what was found in previous research (see Taylor 2018; Walker 2014), but also included conversations on LGBT issues, pop culture, and experiences which were not part of the focus on previous research. Within these live streams, sharing one's experiences as an LGBT person influence the type of stream one is streaming or viewing, like how streamers and viewers interacting with each other during live streams influences the entertainment of the stream itself.

Some limitations of this study include only watching streams of those that speak English and have the English tag and not being able to watch streamers that speak in other languages due to lack of fluency in other languages. Future research could investigate these boundaries within streamers from other parts of the world to see if there are any similarities or differences. Another limitation is that self-identified trolls were not interviewed to get their perspective on what the LGBTQIA+ tag means to them and what this provokes. Even though there would be some difficulties recruiting self-identified trolls due to the stigma around the term, future research could investigate what they think and the social networks they must see if there are some similarities or differences between LGBT streamers and viewers and how they interact. Additionally, this study only looks at viewers who participate in the chat and does not investigate viewers that only watch and do not use the chat at all. Future research investigating these other places for interacting with streamers and viewers could look further into this and either try a different method for recruiting viewers that do not participate in the chat or for investigating the impact of interactions through all types of chats in streams.

A final significant limitation was the COVID-19 pandemic that began at the start of data collection for this project. This likely affected participant recruitment since these interviews would be online through Zoom and, with the increase in the number of video conference meetings and classes throughout the day, it is possible that the Zoom fatigue may have deterred potential participants from participating in this study. Also, with COVID-19, came a lot of streamers who started streaming during the pandemic and many of the participants in this study are those that started streaming around that time and thus were relatively new Twitch users, which could affect my findings. Future research could replicate this study at a different time to compare findings. Studies around media should be repeated more often either way because, as Taylor (2018) mentions, media changes fast and one update to a website can make an impact in the way streamers and viewers interact with each other.

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Appendix A: Demographics of Participants

Pseudonym	**Age**	**Gender and Pronouns**	**Sexual Orientation**	**Race**	**General Location**
Jordan	26	Male (he/him/his)	Bisexual	Mexican American	Urban, Southern United States
Brandon	27	Male (he/him/his)	Gay	White	Urban, Southern United States
Em	24	Non-binary (they/them/theirs)	Lesbian	White	Urban, Eastern United States
Samuel	40	Non-binary (they/them/theirs)	Bisexual	Hispanic	Suburban, Southern United States
Jamie	36	Female (she/her/hers)	Bisexual	White	Both suburban and urban, Western United States
Victor	31	Male (though questioning) (he/him/his; they/them/theirs)	Gay	White	Suburban, Canada
Sean	26	Gender apathetic (no preference although tends to identify with he/him/his)	Queer	White	Suburban, Western United States
Justine	22	Non-binary/Gender fluid (they/them/theirs; occasionally he/him/his)	Bisexual	Filipino	Urban, Western United States
Max	24	Non-binary/gender fluid (they/them/theirs; okay with she/her/hers)	Bisexual/ ”Ace” (asexual /aromantic) /Questioning	White	Suburban, Eastern United States
An	31	Female (she/her/hers)	Lesbian	Chinese	Urban, Southeast Asia
Lindsey	30	Trans woman (as stated by her) (she/her/hers)	Pansexual	White	Rural, Midwestern United States

Appendix B: Twitch Terms

Term	Definition
Streamers	People who appear in the live stream and engage the viewers
Viewers	People who watch the live stream and interact with the streamer and other viewers
Stream	Live broadcast showing the streamer and the game they are playing
Overlay	Design used on the stream (i.e., border, streamer's branding, dashboard with a counter for subscriptions or "bits"
Subscriptions/Subscribers	Viewers who pay at least $4.99 a month (USD) to a streamer and get an icon next to their username and that streamer's emoticons
Gift subscriptions	Subscriptions given to viewers by other viewers watching the stream
Bits	Twitch's version of tipping streamers
Tag	The label that streamers apply to their streams to describe their content and help potential viewers find them within the search engine
Chat	The chat box to the right of the stream on Twitch's webpage
Emotes	Icons that viewers can use in their messages in the chat

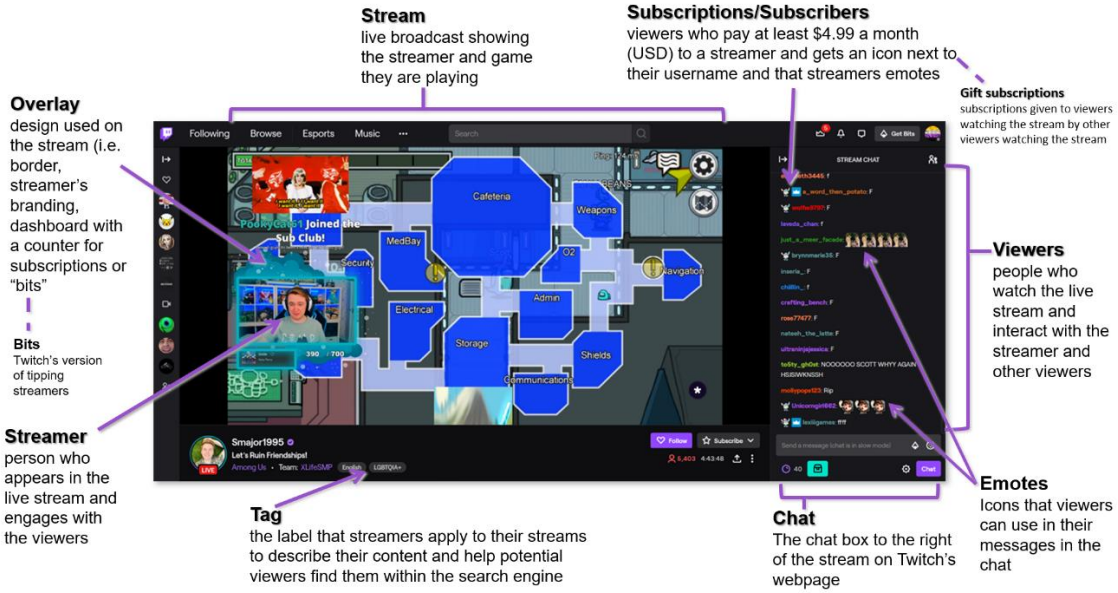

Image 15. Twitch Terms with a screenshot from Smajor1995's stream taken on August 27th, 2020

Appendix C: Observation Template

Note: Use timestamps of moments when possible so that, when looking back at VODs (video on demand of past streams), you can find the time the moment occurred.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="4"><u>General Information</u></th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Stream Name:</td><td colspan="2">Date & Time Started:</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Game(s) Played:</td><td colspan="2">Tags other than “LGBTQIA+” used:</td></tr>
<tr><td># of Viewers (taken every 30 min):</td><td>Stream Time Length:</td><td colspan="2">Amt. of Time Observed:</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="4"><u>Interactions between Streamers and Viewers</u></th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Conversations/Statements
For conversations specifically about LGBT identity and topics, go to “LGBT Identity” section.</td><td colspan="2">Activities Involving More Than Just Messages in Chat</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2" rowspan="5">Streamer mentioning something a viewer or viewer(s) said in chat:</td><td colspan="2">Does the streamer have a P.O. Box?
[ ] Y [ ] N</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Does the streamer mention anything they received in their P.O. Box? [ ] Y [ ] N</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">If yes, how does the streamer mention what they received?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Bots in Chat: [ ] Y [ ] N</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">What functions do these bots have and how are streamers and viewers utilizing them?</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Subscription and “bit” messages:
screenshot</td><td colspan="2">Games that allow for viewers to participate:
[ ] Y [ ] N</td></tr>
</table>

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Viewers mass reacting to streamers (everyone posting the same emoji/statement/etc): *screenshots*</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>What elements allow for the interaction between streamers and viewers in this game or games?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Other elements where viewer participation can be gaged (list them and state how they are used):</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2"><u>Norms and Guidelines</u></td></tr>
<tr><td>Are there certain guidelines that must be followed in the chat put in place by the streamer? [ ] Y [ ] N</td><td rowspan="2">What happens when these guidelines are not followed by a viewer?</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">What are the guidelines or norms followed?</td></tr>
<tr><td>Who is involved?
[ ] Streamer [ ] Viewers [ ] Both</td></tr>
<tr><td>What actions are taken to resolve the issue?
[ ] viewer is automatically banned
[ ] streamer/viewers give warnings and, if it continues, the viewer is banned
[ ] viewer stays in the chat and nothing happens
[ ] Other, please specify:</td></tr>
<tr><td>How are these guidelines enacted by the viewers?</td><td>How much involvement takes place in dealing with the problematic viewer and how long does it take?</td></tr>
</table>

LGBT Identity	
Visual Elements	
LGBT images or scenes shown on the stream, reasons why they are shown, and reactions from viewers *screenshot*:	Emojis/emoticons used in chat that resemble LGBT symbols and the context they are used in:
Conversations	
Do the streamers or viewers mention LGBT identity? [ ] Y [ ] N	
In what context is LGBT identity mentioned? [ ] Personal [ ] Political [ ] Related to the video game played [ ] Related to other video games mentioned [ ] Other	
Describe the way LGBT identity was mentioned based on the context marked in the previous question.	
Personal:	Related to the video game played:
Political:	Related to other video games mentioned:
Other:	
Community Building	
Online Places Used Outside of Twitch	
Does the streamer have an online place such as a social media site outside of Twitch where they and their viewers can interact with each other? [ ] Y [ ] N	

If yes, what is/are the place(s)?	If yes, is this location available to all viewers, or only those who are subscribed to the streamer on Twitch? [ ] all viewers [ ] only subscribers
Live Streaming/Video Gaming Culture	
Identifiers Used to Show that Viewers/Streamers are Part of that Streamer's Community	
Visual elements that show membership during streams (emojis/emoticons, subscriber symbols, etc.):	
Does the streamer sell merchandise with their logo or anything related to their live streams on Twitch? [ ] Y [ ] N	
Other Interactions between Streamers and Viewers that Do Not Fit the Previous Categories	
Potential things to ask about in interviews	

Appendix D: Interview Template

Questions to ask Everyone: Demographics 1. Age?

2. Gender? Pronouns?
3. Sexuality?
4. Race?
5. Geographical location?
    a. Country? State/Region?
    b. Rural or urban?

Video Game Culture and Twitch

6. How interested are you in video games and how often do you play?
7. How often do you interact with others involved in video game culture such as online game play, social media, websites about video games, eSports, clubs in schools/campus, etc. and why?
    a. What are some of the positive qualities of video game culture you like?
    b. What are some of the more negative qualities of the video game culture you don't like?
    c. Do you think people in video game culture tend to be accepting towards LGBTQIA+ people? Why or why not?
        i. (If not) Does this affect which people you interact with online and/or how you curate your presence online?
8. How do you feel about the Twitch community?
    a. What are the positive things you like about the Twitch community?
    b. What are some things you dislike about the Twitch community?
    c. Do you think the Twitch community tends to be more accepting of LGBT people, especially compared to video game culture overall?
9. Have you participated in streams that are not tagged "LGBTQIA+" as well?
    a. Are there any major differences? Similarities?
    b. Do you prefer streams tagged "LGBTQIA+" or not? Why?
10. What types of conversations have you been a part of in these Twitch streams tagged
"LGBTQIA+?"

    a. Do you talk about LGBT topics in these conversations and, if so, could you tell me what those conversations look like?
    b. Do you talk about video games and, if so, what types of video games do you talk about?
        i. Are they for a specific console? Video game series?
        ii. Are any of those video games LGBT related? iii. Have you discovered any new video games to play from these conversations?

iv. Have you found others who play the same video games as you?
v. Have you found new people to play those video games with online through these Twitch streams?

LGBT Identity

1. Do you live in an area with an active LGBT community with resources available?
    a. If so, do you participate in activities for the LGBT community? Why or why not?
    b. If not, do you have friends within your community that are supportive?
2. Do you go online to find (more ((if in area with active LGBT community))) LGBT affirming communities?
3. Do you feel like you can mention your interest in video games within the communities you live in?
4. What do you present about yourself online within Twitch and others in video game culture in regard to your LGBT identity?
    a. Why do you mention these things?
        i. (If participant says they are open about their LGBT identity) Why do you feel like you can be more open?
        ii. (If participant says they are not open about their LGBT identity) Why do you feel like you can't be open about it?
    b. Are you open with your family and friends?
        i. (If they are open) … ii. (If they are not open) …
5. Do you feel like you can mention your LGBT identity with people in video game culture?
6. Has finding and participating in these Twitch streams tagged "LGBTQIA+" given you a sense of community and support that you may not be able to get elsewhere?
    a. If so, how have the streams and their communities provided that support?

Questions to ask Streamers:

1. Why do you stream? What got you to start streaming?
2. Why do you use the LGBTQIA+ tag for your streams and what were your expectations with it?
3. Do you know how your viewers find you and what the most common way is?
4. How do you interact with viewers in the chat?
    a. Do you have discussions? Use bots in the chat? Play games that allow the viewers to participate? Anything else?
    b. Are there some types of interactions that work better than others?
    c. Are there types of interaction techniques that you try to avoid and why?
5. Do you solely use Twitch to interact with viewers? Or do you use other means as well such as social media sites, Discord, or anything else?

   a. (If stated other means) Are these other sites available to all your viewers or are they restricted to your subscribers on Twitch?
   b. (If stated other means – Patreon) Do you have any content or benefits that you give to people who donate to your Patreon? If so, what kind?
   c. (If only Twitch) Why do you only use Twitch and not any other social media sites for interaction?
6. What guidelines do you try to maintain with your viewers in the chat?
   a. How do you make sure these guidelines are maintained?
   b. Who helps maintain these guidelines? Yourself? Viewers? Moderators?
7. In your opinion, what does a good Twitch community look like and do you think yours fulfills your values?
8. What types of video games do you play?
   a. How do you select what video games you'll play on stream?
   b. Are they for a certain console?
   c. Are they LGBT related?
   d. Why are these video games the ones you play?
9. Are there things that active viewers say or do that makes you feel welcome in the community you created?
10. Are there times when you have conflicts with viewers or have issues with them? Do these times make you feel not welcome or make you think about no longer streaming?
    a. Where any of those conflicts related to the "LGBTQIA+" tag or your LGBTQIA+ identity?
    b. Have these conflicts been resolved?
       i. (If yes) Who was part of the party that help resolve the issues?
          1. How did that make you feel?

       ii. (If no) Are there things you wish could happen either in regard to Twitch or with your viewers that could help resolve the issue?

Questions to ask Viewers:

1. Why do you participate in the chat for the streamers you watch?
   a. Have you made any connections with people from talking to streamers and viewers in the chat?
      i. Do you interact with other viewers/streamers solely through Twitch? 1. Do you use other means as well such as Facebook, Twitter, Discord, etc that the streamer has set up?
   b. Have you many any connections with people from talking to streamers and viewers that you interact with outside of these streams and/or their related community spaces?
2. How did you find the streamers that you watch?

    a. Do you search “LGBTQIA+” to find streams? Or do you hear about streamers and then see the “LGBTQIA+” tag?
3. What does a streamer tagging their streams using the “LGBTQIA+” tag mean to you?
    a. What do you expect to see from a streamer that uses the “LGBTQIA+” tag for their stream?
    b. What kind of games do you expect to see these streamers play and/or talk about?
    c. What do you do if the streamer’s streams and community is not what you expected in regard to being LGBT-affirming?
4. Have you experienced any negative interactions with streamers and/or other viewers on Twitch?
    a. Were they in streams tagged “LGBTQIA+?”
    b. Was there any resolutions? Did you or the other people leave or end the negative interaction?
    c. How did that situation make you feel about Twitch, the streamers, viewers, video game culture, etc.?
        i. Did it affect your opinion on video game culture, Twitch, and/or those streamers and viewers? ii. Did it affect the way you presented yourself or the information you share online after that?
5. Do you subscribe to any Twitch streamers?
    a. (If so) Are there any perks you get with that subscription such as access to Discord, emoticons/emojis, subscription messages showing up on the streamer’s live stream, etc?
    b. (If not) Have you ever wanted to and, if so, why?
        i. (if not) Why not?
    c. Have you ever been gifted a subscription from a viewer of the stream while you were participating/watching?
        i. (If so) How did you find out and what was your reaction?

More questions to be added after observation stage

Appendix E: Email Based Informed Consent

Template Revised: 05/03/2020

University of Nebraska Lincoln

EMAIL BASED INFORMED CONSENT

IRB Project ID #: 20454

1. **Participant Study Title:** Searching Through the "LGBTQIA+" Tag on Twitch: How LGBTQIA+-affirming Video Game Streamers and Viewers Interact and Build Spaces Online

2. **Invitation**

Dear [name],

My name is Cadyn Williamson. I am conducting a study on how interactions between streamers and viewers in Twitch streams tagged "LGBTQIA+" (chat, subscriber messages, gameplay that involves audience participation, etc.) help create LGBTQIA+-affirming online spaces and communities for LGBTQIA+ people interested video games. If you are 19 years of age or older and are either a streamer or active viewer in Twitch streams tagged "LGBTQIA+," you may participate in this research.

3. **What is the reason for doing this research study?**

Finding places where LGBT people can feel welcome has been part of the "going to the big city" rhetoric shared within the LGBT community for years. However, with the innovation of the Internet and video games, the idea of place has shifted with the ability to find LGBT communities online. This crosses over into video game culture and the recent trend of live streaming gameplay, especially on the website, Twitch which has a "LGBTQIA+" tag that streamers can use for their streams. This research is designed to (1) understand how the "LGBTQIA+" can be used to create LGBT communities within online video game culture and (2) how interactions with streamers and viewers within these tagged streams can help create these online communities.

4. **What will be done during this research study?**

You will be asked to participate in an in-depth interview with the principal investigator. This interview will take approximately one hour of your time and, with your permission, will be audio-recorded. You may use a computer, phone, or other device with Internet capabilities and Zoom to complete the interview. A follow-up interview may occur if the principal investigator still has some questions. This follow-up interview will also happen in Zoom and will take no longer than one hour of your time.

The meetings in Zoom will have "Wait for host to join" enabled and a password will be required to enter the meeting. You will be required to go into a private location where there will be minimal disruptions as well as close all other programs and browser windows during the research-related call. These Zoom interviews will be recorded and saved to the principal investigator's local desktop hardware on their password-protected computer and then uploaded to our university accounts in Box, a university-approved cloud storage account.

5. What are the possible risks of being in this research study?

There are no known risks to you from being in this research study.

6. What are the possible benefits to you?

You are not expected to get any benefit from being in this study.

7. Will you be compensated for being in this research study?

We will not pay you to take part in this study or pay for any out of pocket expenses related to your participation.

8. How will information about you be protected?

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect the privacy and the confidentiality of your study data; however, in some circumstances we cannot guarantee absolute privacy and/or confidentiality.

This study will involve the collection of private information (name, dates, etc.). Your information could be used or distributed to another researcher for future research studies without an additional informed consent from you. Identifiers (name, dates, etc.) will be removed prior to being distributed.

This study involves personal data from an EEA country and is subject to the European Union General Data Protection Regulation (EU GDPR). The EU GDPR requires

researchers that collect, store, or process personal data to comply with stricter privacy standards and give EU citizens more access to and control over their own data. As a regulation of the EU, the GDPR applies directly to the 28 member states of the EU and in the three additional countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway) that, together with the EU, make up the European Economic Area ("EEA").

The research records will be securely stored electronically through University approved methods, a Box account connected to the university for cloud storage and password-protected computers, and will only be seen by the research team and/or those authorized to view, access, or use the records during and after the study is complete.

Those who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person, agency, or sponsor as required by law or contract or institutional responsibility. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings and may be reported individually, or as group or summarized data but your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

9. What are your rights as a research subject?

You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study.

For study related questions, please contact the investigator(s):

Principal Investigator: Cadyn Williamson *E-mail:* cwilliamson@huskers.unl.edu
Secondary Investigator: Kelsy Burke, PhD *Office:* 1(402)472-3009
E-mail: kburke@unl.edu

For questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB):

- Phone: 1(402)472-6965
- Email: irb@unl.edu

10. What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study ("withdraw') at any time before, during, or after the research begins for any reason.

Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator or with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

You will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

Documentation of Informed Consent

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. When we start our video call, I will ask for your verbal consent to participate in this research and to audio record the interview. You should print a copy of this page for your records.